THE FASCINATION OF IRELAND

L. EDNA WALTER

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A SPINNER, NEAR GALWAY.

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THE FASCINATION OF IRELAND

WRITTEN
AND PHOTOGRAPHED
BY
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WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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PREFACE

I WISH to acknowledge my indebtedness to the following books: Lady Wilde's "Ancient Legends of Ireland"; Lynd's "Home Life in Ireland"; O'Daly's "Poets and Poetry of Munster"; Clifton Johnson's "Isle of the Shamrock"; W. Lorcan O'Byrne's "Kings and Vikings" and "A Land of Heroes," in which the old heroic stories of Ireland are so charmingly retold; and to the works of J. M. Synge, for permission to quote from which I have to thank Messrs. Maunsel and Co. My thanks also are due to Dr. Hyde and his publishers for their kind permission to use the "Beggar's Song" and the fire-saving prayer from his "Religious Songs of Counacht."

L. EDNA WALTER.

MANCHESTER,
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IRELAND

CHAPTER I

THE COAL O' THE COUNTRY

"Be first in a wood and last in a bog" runs an old Gaelic proverb, and the man who first pronounced it had evidently received in his face the swinging branches released by his predecessor on a forest path. He found the bog, however, a different matter; it was the second traveller who, having seen the first disappear from his place, was able to avoid the hole himself. It is a long time since the first part of the proverb has had any general application, for the forests which existed at the time when Gaelic was the only spoken language in Ireland have long since perished, and Ireland is poorer in timber than either of her sister countries. The bogs, however, persist, and seem to stand in their chill dreariness and bleak desolation as a sort of mirror, reflecting the poverty of the hillside country-folk.

There was a time when the coal measures from deep down in the earth pushed their way up in

some giant upheaval, and even crowned the peaks of the Kerry Mountains. Glaciers and weather between them, however, wore away all the top layers, and so the coal was torn from the mountains of Ireland. With a different past history the county of Kerry might now have been a teeming hive of industry, coal-waggons might be passing in procession over the Gap of Dunloe, great wharves be blackening the slopes of Valencia Harbour, and Killarney itself be bristling with chimneys. Commerce and industry would, in fact, have killed the shimmering glory of the beautiful land of Kerry, as it has destroyed the moors of Lancashire and blackened its streams. So perhaps it is not altogether to Ireland's loss that her ancient coalfields have left her, and that people visit her to breathe the sweetness of her air and scenes rather than to dig for the fuel of her mines.

In truth, Ireland remains a favoured child of Nature, with her whole rim revelling in beauty; and whether you chance upon the wild and barren country of the Connaught hills, or the heather and ferns of the warm-washed shores of the Atlantic, or the peat and rocks of the boglands, there are few who would not acknowledge that her loveliness is varied.

The boglands of Ireland are a special feature of the country, and have a weird beauty of their own,

AN ARM OF THE ATLANTIC.

Viewed from Valentia Island.

especially among the western hills, where the changing weather throws over the mountains grey mists, which are broken here and there by straying beams of sunshine. Sudden showers sweep quickly by, veiling the landscape one minute and throwing a rainbow arch across it the next. The rainbow colours flit swiftly across the valleys, resting here and there upon the dark cuttings in the bog, the scattered hillocks of drying turf, or the murky water in the new-cut ditch.

When the clouds hold back the rain, then sunlight and shadow chase each other on the mountain sides and over the vast black turf-fields, which stretch for miles, unbroken by even a white-washed cottage. In Connemara a touch of colour is given here and there by the brilliant hues of a woman's skirt, and a gleam of scarlet flashes out in contrast to the brown mountains and the blue skies. Barefooted she picks her way among the peat cuttings, and fills the panniers on her donkey's back with the fuel she is seeking—scarlet skirt, brown shawl, and bare feet making a charming picture in a gleam of sunshine. The high roads are lonely save for an occasional solitary donkey-cart, generally driven by an old woman, who is, as often as not, perched on a pile of peat, from which elevated position she is able to judge the uncertain temper of her steed by the set of his ears.

Far inland to the east the boglands stretch for

miles in flat level country, treeless, barren, and monotonous. Across the coarse grass of the rank turf groups of men go to their work; the sodden peat is cut from the trenches, and the men stand ankle-deep in the black water which drains continuously down.

Peat is found everywhere where the arrangement of the rocks forms any kind of basin which holds in the water and keeps the earth sodden. Scotland, Cumberland, and Wales produce their share; but the interior of Ireland is the greatest peat district, Ireland being a huge natural basin, of which the mountains round the coast form the rim. So the basin, in the centuries that have passed, has been filled with fallen trees, plants, and grasses. These, sinking layer after layer into the warm ooze, have undergone a curious change, and formed beds of stuff which burns when dry.

In the vast stretch of sodden land thousands of square miles of peat, or turf as it is generally called, lie ready to be gathered, and the cutting and stacking of this fuel provides occupation for numbers of the peasantry—men, women, and children. It is an occupation that is neither clean nor healthy, and the men earn by it only little more than a shilling a day.

The turf is cut by a special kind of spade, called a "slane," which only a strong man can wield. His work is to cut the brick-shaped blocks of turf

as quickly as he can, and with a dexterous twist to throw it upon the bank, leaving as even a surface as possible for his return to the same line. His comrades pile the turf on to a barrow, which is wheeled a short distance away and emptied on to uncut ground. Now and then one of the men planes up the bank of quivering earth for the cutter, to assist in the production of clean-cut bricks. They are a tattered crew, these peat-cutters, and their lower garments are soaked with the black mud; torn shirts and frayed corduroys are all that stand between them and the outer air, which even in summer is moist and chill.

Now comes the work of the women and children, who are usually barefooted and be-shawled. They spread out the wet blocks from the heap left by the barrow and leave them thus for a week, during which time the free water runs away. For a further ten days the blocks are set up on end in sets of half a dozen. Another shifting then takes place, and after each removal the bricks are placed nearer together, till the familiar stacks of the bogland are formed about 6 feet high, looking like some prehistoric dwellings blackened with age. After this stage the donkey is brought to the assistance of the family, and with cart or pannier draws home the fuel for the cottage. There it is probably stacked against the cottage wall, or in a heap in front of the door;

there is no concealment as to its whereabouts; it takes up a prominent position in its owner's "patch." Many of the peasants make their living by digging out the turf and sending one of their women to carry the dried spongy bricks through the villages. "Twelve sods a penny!" she cries, as she walks beside her donkey, and the owners of shop or cabin go out to purchase the whole load, or a few dozen sods, according to their means.

Many cottagers in villages far away from trains have never seen coal, and the pretty blue smoke that rises from their roofs is a picturesque detail that can often attract one's gaze upwards, away from the frequent untidiness below.

THE GAP OF DUNLOE.

CHAPTER II

ON THE ROADS

The donkey-cart of the peat-seller s familiar at every market; but it is a moving feature, not a stationary one. It winds its way slowly amongst the stationary donkey-carts that do duty for stalls, while the long soft ears of the standing donkeys move up and down in salutation. The chief thing that strikes one in an Irish market is that the supply of produce is meagre and the business done is neither great nor rapid. Potatoes, apples, and other vegetables, are the chief commodities, and are doled out, not by weight but by measure —well filled and flowing over. An occasional barrow has obviously been brought in by hand, and its owners sit beside it on a wooden box smoking and talking between the spurts of business. Occasionally they find a convenient corner and sit on the pavement, as they do around St. Nicholas's Church in Galway, arranging themselves in groups according to whether they wish to display fowls or eggs or cabbages on the path or roadway. This is a specially good corner in

which to watch the development of family drama. The woman as she sells her wares becomes, quite early in the day, the possessor of cherished coin; thereupon "himself" enters upon the scene and urges reasons why it should be given into his care. As a rule it remains with her, but not because of any lack of argument on the man's part. Cabbage-leaves strew the ground and afford much excitement to the local geese or hens who come prospecting round in search of edible treasure. Children swarm in and out, invariably ragged and usually barefooted, but with a look of good temper and amusement on their faces that betoken an intelligent and contented mind. The children are far outnumbered by the donkeys, the number of which is quite astonishing to behold. Their powers are equally astonishing too, for they trot along the road, frequently carrying an entire family for cargo; the little low two-wheeled cart is loaded to its limit, and there are representatives of all ages of humanity. The strength of the cart is almost as wonderful as the endurance of the donkey.

The most usual driver at ordinary times is, however, an old lady with a shawl; and should her beast take offence at any passing vehicle and show his displeasure by planting his four feet in the direction of the four winds, she has a ready tongue as well as reins and a stick. Should these prove

A PEAT BOG.

ineffective, she has been known to prevent disaster by leaping quickly on to the road and covering the donkey's head with her skirt.

In some parts of Donegal where the coast is much indented from the creeks of Connemara the little "Pookawn," a kind of diminutive Hooker, plays the part of the donkey-cart. Its dark sails, cut on a Spanish pattern, can be seen moving about the landscape as the boat carries its seaweed inland, or its kelp to market. Although it is only three tons, it carries off cattle to the fair, and on Sundays takes the family to Mass ; it is, in fact, in universal request. When its sails are in need of repair, certain preliminaries have to be gone through before the art of needlework is called in. Fresh strong calico is obtained and soaked in fat and butter till it becomes as dark as the original, and not till then is the patch put on.

It is only the well-to-do who drive a pony or horse, and then the usual vehicle is the "outside car," known in England as the jaunting-car. This somewhat resembles a dogcart, with the body turned the other way. You sit two aside on a fairly wide seat, with your feet on a narrow swinging ledge. There is no back-rest, unless you arrange with your neighbour on the other side for mutual support, and nothing to hold on to. All you have to do is to sit well back and trust in Providence, tuning your muscles to swing

with the motion of the car. If there are only three passengers, the driver sits on the off-side seat, but with four he finds a nook for himself in the front. There are some cars—but these savour of civilization and the city—where the driver has a raised seat of his own in front, but in these there is lost that happy comradeship between the driver and his fare which is so pleasant a feature of the country roads; and the driver does not wait for you to begin either.

"Sure I was the boy that drove the hearse at your grandmother's funeral," was remarked to a visitor arriving at a country house. What English Jehu would have opened with a speech like that, hazarded only after a quick glance at the visitor and a smart guess at his age? And what man, however austere, would remain unsociable after such a lead?

One of the first street calls that you hear when you disembark from the mail boat at Kingstown is, "Car here! Car here!" from a cavalcade of drivers, all standing up in particularly unstable positions and waving their whips to attract attention. The same cry meets you again at Dublin, and, in fact, at every big station where travellers are expected. Luggage is stored where any niche suggests a resting-place, and if it falls off at any sudden change of velocity, the owner is expected to be as

cheerful as the driver under the circumstances, and to assist, if need be, in its restoration.

Sometimes, too, there are long cars which carry passengers on a regular service. These will have as many as five pairs of dangling legs on each side, not counting the driver, and a shelf for luggage at the back. It is a heavy load for a pair of horses, but, fortunately, the passengers are glad to guard against cramp by walking up all the hills. The long car will now soon be a relic only, for its place is being gradually usurped by the motor omnibus, whose ungainly form seems sadly out of harmony with the lonely bogland, while its noisy hooting is re-echoed as in pain by the mist-capped mountains rising near at hand.

CHAPTER III

COUNTRY FAIRS

NATURALLY, the roads are at their liveliest at fair times, when they are trodden before sunrise by droves of cattle or sheep, followed by barking dogs and full-voiced herdsmen. The sale of a goat or the purchase of a "boneen" (a little pig which they can often get for two shillings) is enough excuse to bring whole families down from the hills to taste the delights of a fair.

The fair will be held in a country town, and in and near its chief street countless flocks of sheep and herds of cattle are gathered on each side, their owners and dogs having much to do to keep them in place and leave a passage down the middle. Now and then the commotion is increased as some unruly ram or angry bull breaks his bounds and makes a sudden bolt for freedom. Then a crowd of ragged boys and armed men are lost in a cloud of dust till the law-breaker is re-captured and led once more to his place.

Another diversion follows the cry of "Mind yourselves there!" and a herd of sheep is escorted

by its recent purchaser and environed by a crowd of boys and dogs down the narrow gangway. The frightened sheep, however, have no desire for the straight but narrow path. They evade their human escort, and, finding a weak spot in the wall of legs, rush through, making confusion in another herd, after which diversion, a good deal of search and restoration has to be undertaken.

There is a great deal of good-humoured bandying of words as bargaining progresses in all quarters.

"You're asking too much for the little pigs."

"And how would I be getting it if I didn't ask it?"

And then follows the usual extravagant praise of the seller to counteract the belittling remarks of the buyer.

"Sure it's dark in the skin they are, and not pure in the breed."

"It's their skins be as pink as the eastern dawn, and their breed the purest between Mullingar and Tralee."

Then the seller tries persuasion mixed with logic, or, as the onlookers say, "puts his commether on him."

"Thim boneen is foine pigs, and if ye tak thim, ye'll be having the pick o' the market, and be getting home well plaised and aisy in your mind, thinking o' the rint they'll be bringing you. But if you're after laving thim, sure it's his lardship him-

self will be offering twice the price for the illigant cratures, and you losing the chance o' your loife."

Either the logic of the argument or the quality of the pigs win the day, and the bargain being clenched by a loud clasp of the hands, the pigs begin their perilous adventure through the avenue of their neighbours.

Between the simple stalls, frequently improvised out of upturned barrels and a few boards, a man will swagger about showing off the points of a prancing horse. This is against the law, for horses are not supposed to be sold except on the proper fair greens, but the Irishman's love of a quiet deal in horses far outstrips his regard for any regulations, and as it generally happens that the police are out of the way, the risk of a fine is not great.

Here and there a wandering beggar will be singing some ballad or song. As often as not, the song has a religious or philosophic flavour, as the following—heard by Dr. Hyde, in Connaught—shows:

THE MERRY JOVIAL BEGGAR.

I have no more a golden store—this sets the world a-scorning,
Yet I be happy every night and merry every morning;
Each day my bread I ask of God, He sends me not away,
So I shall always merry be till I be laid in clay.

Upon the roads I pray my prayer, my thanks to God I pour,
Good prayers I have upon my tongue to say at every door.
No fear have I the night to pass, exposed to winter's rigour,
For every house will welcome me, the merry jovial beggar.

I ask no bed, no sheet, no quilt—a wisp of straw lay down,
And I shall sleep as sound and deep as Kings on bed of down.
I dream of heaven, the glorious home where angels walk in white;
My guardian angel at my side will watch me through the night.

I seek no gold to have or hold, for riches wear not well,
And countless thousands seeking it have cast themselves in hell;
For gold must melt like snow in Lent, before the breath of Spring,
But the soul that counts it, it must die—a low, unlovely thing.

A man can sing this outside a public-house and not be laughed at, for religion plays a great part in the everyday lives and speech of all the people.

More than a century ago the singers of ballads and rhymes were men of importance—at least in their own eyes; and there was one Turlogh O'Brien who used to frequent all the fairs and festivals in Munster, and was so stalwart in appearance that he was regarded as an object of terror wherever he went. He sang in Irish, and one of his favourite verses runs:

Hurrah! who'd sneer at my little dog?
Hurrah! who'd tear my old cape off?
Hurrah! who'd say I am not a gentleman?
For my name is Turlogh the Mighty.

This was his equivalent of the more popular invitation to "Tread on the tail of my coat," and led to a good fight with anyone who accepted the challenge, especially after the introduction of a little whisky into the day's experiences.

CHAPTER IV

BEGGARS AND TRAMPS

Country people and peasants set great store by the giving of alms, and many are the stories and poems which have that as a central idea. The beggars who go on the road have a pleasant way of asking alms, and often sing some such petition as "A poor person am I, without food, without provisions, without portion, without coat, without goods, without hope, without house, without warmth," and so on, all in a sort of metrical chant. Only the very poor know these old chants or poems, and they add to their literary store plenty of stories which explain how good and profitable for the soul it is to be giving alms.

They generally collect in kind, and many an old woman can be seen on the high roads or bog-paths carrying a sack, which she gradually fills with potatoes, or flour, or meal.

Less than a century ago there was one well-known beggarman named O'Farrell who levied taxes on the farmers of Munster, and began his

A CONNEMARA DONKEY.

visit by reciting a begging petition or prayer of extraordinary length—in Gaelic, of course. Then he gathered up his contributions, which he preferred to take in the form of wool, butter, or oatmeal. Should the farmer's wife give him only seven pounds of wool when he expected fourteen, he threw the first gift in her face, and poured out doggerel lines of abuse which he threatened to publish in the neighbourhood. This produced the full stone, which he added to his store, and he then drove away with a cart full of produce to sell at Waterford. His lean grey horse was familiar to all, and it was said that "there wasn't a coloured cloth known that he hadn't a patch of it on his coat." To still further add to the attractiveness of his attire he wore a pair of top-boots with long spurs!

The householders seem to expect one or two beggars at least every day, and to be prepared for them. As soon as the rap comes at the half-open door the housewife hastens to her store, and brings back her hands full of potatoes, or it may be of bread. Sometimes in these modern days the gift is varied by a packet of tea; very rarely does it consist of money.

Sometimes the beggar will wait five or ten minutes inside the door without saying a word, his bag on the floor bearing witness to his errand. In due time, when the housewife has finished

what she is doing, she asks him what he would like, giving him a limited choice.

"Is it potatoes or flour?"

"Flour," he answers, and tenders his bag while she goes to her store. If he is a careful beggar, he has a clean cloth for the flour; but more often he throws it anyhow into a distinctly uninviting wrapper.

Then he may change it for porter at some little inn and do himself no good by it, or he may sell it in some far-off village and spend the proceeds on weedy clothes.

If the beggar has no fixed abode, he gets his night's lodging in the same way as his food. He walks into a roadside cottage or farmhouse and asks for shelter. Then he sleeps by the fireside or on the settle. In the morning he is probably invited to share in the simple breakfast, or he will use the turf fire to cook some of his own supplies in one of the three-legged pots that serves equally well for boiling or baking.

"Will you give us the price of a grain o' tay for the love of God?" asks one, and adds, "May the Heavens be your bed!" as a copper falls into his palm.

Sometimes they sleep out all night under the hedges or in a ditch. If they wish for a change, they will accost a stranger with the statement: "Sure I haven't the price of a night's lodgin', and I'm afther walkin' many miles."

Occasionally in the eastern counties you will meet bands of men and women, practically tramps, in scanty and ragged clothing, who have left their hovels and are tramping to some distant glen in search of ferns or other plants. They will spend the night in the open, sleeping under a shed if they find one, or in a ditch if they don't, and not minding much what it is. Like others of their kind, they do little good for themselves with the money. It goes in porter or whisky, and their clothes remain as ragged and meagre as before.

A curious class who practically live on the roads are the tinkers, who seem to form a community of their own. They, too, have generally no settled abode, but sleep in the ditches, or in tents or caravans of their own. They are popularly supposed to possess supernatural powers, especially if they come from the west; and no mother likes her child to be looked at by them, lest evil befall it.

CHAPTER V

A GLIMPSE OF THE WEST

It is a matter for sadness that the most picturesque characteristics of the Irish peasantry are found in company with the greatest poverty. Wherever the women are to be seen in their beautiful red petticoats, and the men in their grey homespun tweeds, there is to be found the lack of most comforts and the terror of a bad year. This is very different from the conditions in Brittany and in the western Islands of Holland, where the beauty and quality of the peasant's dress and ornaments are in proportion to their wealth.

In Ireland, however, in the west of Connaught, you get some glimpse of the attractiveness of the people's dress, and that best in the part which is labelled, in official language, the "Congested Districts."

A drive on a fine Sunday afternoon will show many a charming group of red-skirted maidens sitting where they can see everyone who passes, their dress showing up as a lovely spot of colour against the grass which is always of such a

brilliant green in Ireland. They keep themselves a little distance from observation, because they have that shyness which accompanies the good breeding of even the very poor in the West of Ireland. In truth, their manners are so charming that the most ragged urchin is polite by inheritance.

The men are in groups, too, and often engaged on a Sunday afternoon in playing the game of hurley or in watching it. In the morning they have all been to Mass dressed in their best, the better off in clean woollen garments woven at home or near at hand.

Dotted about all round the jagged coast are farming and fishing villages. A few fields of oats or plots of potatoes, with here and there a poor patch of grass providing scanty food for some sheep, represent the farming part of the village. A little quay to which are moored two or three sailing-boats suggests that fishing plays some part in the village life. Blue smoke rises from the boats, as from the cabins, showing that even there they use no coal, but do their primitive cooking with the universal peat. The village may consist of one street with small adjacent houses on each side, or it may be made up of a number of straggling cottages; generally there will be one or two public-houses among them, and if the village is a large one it will possess a church.

Often the cottages are of the old type without windows, and on this inhospitable coast they frequently have the bare rock as floor. Every member of the family is busy in spasms: some may be on their knees weeding their little field of oats or potatoes; one may be minding the cherished cow as it seeks for fodder on an infertile roadside, another fetches home the ducks from the water. At certain times the men go off in the old boats to sell their "turf" across the water in Inishmaan of the Aran Isles, or further across the bay to the coast of County Clare.

The seacoast, inhospitable enough for months in the year, gives one harvest on its shore, and the seaweed of its rocks brings a few pounds to the families living in the bare-walled cottages hard by.

As early as sunrise men and boys go down to the shore and carry down the light curraghs that are kept above high-water mark. They wade out with these, and then, jumping in, steer round the many creeks and coves where the seaweed grows. They are armed with a pole having a strong cross-piece at the end, so that they can push it down among the rocks and drag the growing weed from its hold. By choosing their anchorage according to the tide, they can cover a wide area, and the low water of the spring tide allows them to get far out to rocks which they cannot reach at other

ST. NICHOLAS'S CHURCH, GALWAY.

times. Laden with their shining cargo, they come back to the shore wading through the shallow sea in order to lighten the curragh. All the children are engaged in pulling weed from the uncovered rocks and spreading it out to dry in the wind and sun on the barren stones. The children run about the shore, picking up rounded stones—the heaviest they can carry—to keep the drying weed from blowing away. When dry it is gathered up, and everyone carries great armfuls of it to add to the reddish-brown heaps that stand up like a row of giant molehills. It is a pretty sight to watch the curraghs come in—the boys jumping about in the water behind, and the bare-footed girls in their red petticoats running to and fro across the sands, carrying loads of the glistening red weed on their heads as the men get it out of the black-tarred boats. In the Aran Islands the men rake it from the rocks, and the girls who carry it up the cliff wear a raw sheepskin on their shoulders to catch the salt water that trickles off.

It is a merry scene, too; the air is filled with music, and the girls sing snatches of some old-time melody, for on this wild coast they still speak their old Gaelic language, and remember their old folk-songs and stories. Even the babies are brought down to the shore, for all hands are wanted at this busy time, and they are crooned off to sleep in the

shadow of a dried stack by the sound of an old lullaby.

One of these old lullabies tells how the fairies have stolen away a young wife from her home and kept her inside the lios, or fairy fort, where she spends all her time in nursing the fairy children. Once a year she is allowed outside, and then she sings this song to the child, hoping that the maiden "down by the rill" may hear it and rescue her :

"O maid that standest down by the rill,
Sho ho lo, Sho ho lo,
O dost thou know my grief and my ill ?
Sho ho lo, Sho ho lo.
A year and a day I was snatched so still,
Sho ho lo, Sho ho lo.
From my love to the lios on the little green hill,
Sho ho lo, Sho ho lo,
Shoheen, Shoheen, Shoheen, Shoheen,
Sho ho lo, Sho ho lo,
Shoheen, Shoheen, Shoheen, Shoheen,
Sho ho lo, Sho ho lo."

When the stacks of dried weed are built up, they are burnt, and two or three men or boys pile on more weed and keep it all ablaze for ten or twelve hours. The mass inside becomes molten with the intense heat, and clouds of thick cream smoke rise into the air. It is heavy work bringing the heaps of dried weed to the central bonfire, for they try to use up a ton of it at one burning. Then as the fire burns itself out, the heap is covered and left for a few days. If the men can repeat this process for four or five days, they will manage to

MARKET DAY.

get a ton of the burnt ash or kelp. The cakes of the hard, dark-looking stuff are broken up, and are taken off by curragh to the nearest village where it can be sold. The shopkeeper of the place then tests it to see the amount of iodine it contains, and though his test is of a very rough and ready kind, he bases his price upon it. There is no competition, because there is no other buyer within some miles, so the kelpmakers have to put up with his valuation; they may get anything between £3 or £5 for a ton of their product, or they may have it refused after all their toil and labour.

It may be seen how much the Connemara people depend on the weather, for in a wet season their turf will not dry, and there is no trade with Aran and Clare, while the yield of kelp for the same reason will be pitiably small. The potatoes will be bad, and many a household will be without keep for themselves or their pigs—without even enough dry peat to keep a flickering fire under the pot.

No one has any money in these parts, and the provision of a new boat, even a small one, is a serious undertaking. It is done in a curious way, too. The fisherman buys his own wood, or at least he gives £4 to the skipper of one of the sailing boats to buy it for him at one of his ports of call. Then he hires a carpenter to come

and do the work, giving him a share of his house and food for about two mouths. Into the contract enters a stipulated quantity of whisky, without which the man will not work, and the fisherman has to lend a hand when required. The expert's wage comes to something like a shilling a day, so a man must possess £6 or more before he can see his way to own a boat.

The Congested Districts Board has tried to encourage boat-building as a trade, and has also bought several boats, which they call "nobbies," to be let out to poor fishermen on easy terms. A boat-builder also makes the little local boats for those who cannot afford to buy their own timber and hire their own man. The £8 or so, however, which he charges, comes in but slowly, and it often takes two or three years before it is paid off, for, as they say, "it is a lot of money for a poor man."

The black curraghs of the West of Ireland are very distinctive in their simplicity. They are merely made of canvas stretched over a wooden framework and then covered with tar. They can be launched in very shallow water, and can be carried about by a couple of men. Often near a little fishing settlement dozens of them can be seen upside down on props, some ready for use, some being repaired or drying with fresh tar. When one is to be launched, one man lifts up the prow and the other puts his head underneath ; the

outside man puts his head underneath the stern, and so two apparently headless bodies are seen walking down to the shore with rather cautious footsteps, as the owner of neither pair of legs can see far in front of him. It is a tricky job to lower the curragh gently into its right position, even if there is a sloping slip for it to be carried down upon before launching. When not heavily laden, the canoe will float like a cockle-shell and twist round from its course for the most trifling cause. It is a flimsy craft, and a sudden encounter with a sharp rock makes a hole, which needs prompt attention. Usually the attention is limited to stuffing a piece of tarred canvas, or, failing that, a bit of stuff cut hastily from one of the owner's garments, through from the outside, the pressure of the sea keeping it in. Frequently this temporary expedient is made to last for some weeks, and the boat is rowed on its way across the channel betweeu the myriads of western islands, with a blissful belief in luck which is sometimes destroyed by an unexpected squall.

These curraghs are all that are used, even across such swift currents as those that run between the Aran Isles, or across the four or five miles of the Sound which separates the Blasket Isles from the tiny harbour at the base of Clogher Head.

CHAPTER VI

POVERTY

In the western parts of Connaught there are two kinds of barrenness—the barrenness of the stone-covered earth and the barrenness of the stripped bog. The peasants who try to make a living on either are in sore straits, and it is hard to say which are the worst off; but the houses on the stony lands at least look drier. These are built of stone roughly thrown together, but not white-washed, and in the villages they are huddled as closely together as possible, as though to lend each other neighbourly support. The fields of oats, or pasture, or potatoes, are surrounded by walls of loose stone piled up on each other, and even the patches under cultivation are broken with great masses of barren rock, so that it is easy to see in how primitive a state agriculture must be. Instead of the plough, there must be the spade, and generally an old man to use it; instead of the mowing-machine, there is the sickle, and the women do the cutting more often than the men. They can be seen hurrying to and fro carrying hampers of cut

grass or potatoes on their backs, and always with their feet bare. On the stony hillsides a few ponies can be seen nibbling at the scanty grass. The Connemara ponies have long been famous, and sturdy little things they look as they gallop up the hills as sure-footed as chamois. The Congested Districts Board thought they were deteriorating, and tried to improve the breed from outside. But the people are sceptical as to the results, and say that the new ponies are not as good as the old stock. The Board, however, tell a different tale, and point to the improved breed as one of the successes of their efforts. Thus it is that official reports are not exactly in agreement with the opinion of those affected—a fate not entirely unknown in the history of official reports.

One of the Board's teachers was in one district spreading valuable knowledge as to the rearing of poultry. An old farmer invited her to see his flock and complained of them.

"It's scarcely an egg that some of the hens do be layin'," he said.

The teacher scanned the feathered tribe.

"You'll not do much till you get rid of that rooster," she said, pointing to a draggled-looking cock. "You'd better get another at once."

At her next visit the teacher again looked up the farmer, but found the rooster still ruling.

"Why haven't you cleared him out?" she asked.

"Shure he's a divil to foight!" was the answer, and that ended the matter.

The same Board thought it would improve the donkeys, too, and imported a few from Spain. Whether, however, they disliked the wet of Connemara and yearned for the sun of Spain, or whether it was from some other cause, the imported donkeys did not make themselves popular, and it is said that the new race that sprang up developed spindle-legs, and became a laughing-stock.

A few sheep and small cattle share with the pony and ass the search for scanty grass, but few of the cottages can own more than one cow, whose milk provides the chief food of the family. Of course there is the pig, but when the season is bad there is not enough food for the "boneens," and they may die before they can be sold to pay the rent.

All the houses consist of one story only, with generally a yard in front of the door. The wall round the yard in most instances has fallen to pieces, and in any case there is a free way in from the road or path beyond. This yard is the supposed domain of the domestic animals—the pigs, the goats, the chickens—but the cottage door being open, they wander without interruption into the one room beyond, in fact, it would take a far more indefatigable watchfulness to keep them out

than is ever available in these rough cabins. The animals make themselves quite at home on the earth or flag-stone floor within, and will share with the baby the contents of any pot that is within reach. The pig is specially gifted in the way of inspection, and it is hard to say which is cleaner, it or the baby ; they are, however, companions in curiosity and, quite obviously, on a friendly footing.

There are no porches to the doors, and there is no arrangement for ventilation except through the door, which is made in two parts ; and even when the lower one is shut, the upper one is invariably open. This gives light inside, for the windows are usually only small square holes with small panes of glass in each, and will not open. In the winter the pig and cow are taken in and housed with the family, chiefly out of a feeling of kindness for the animals and a desire that they should not suffer from the cold and wet. All the same, it makes the cabin very unhealthy, and the Congested Districts Board has tried to bribe the peasants into putting up pig-styes and cow-houses, or, failing that, to partition off from the living room the part allotted to the animals. It offers 30s. for the partition, and £2 10s. for the outside sty or house.

These dwellings are usually thatched with sedge or straw, and the thatch gives a most picturesque

touch. The thatching is generally done in a slack time by one of the men of the family, who takes the greatest pride in his work, the completion of it being celebrated by a family festival.

The Aran islanders thatch their cabins with rye straw—in fact, the rye is only grown for that purpose—and the straw is piled up into a heap to dry in the kitchen till it is wanted for the new roof. If several cottagers embark upon thatching preparations at the same time, it behoves the passing pedestrian to be wary as he descends the village street. From each cottage comes the sound of a wooden hammer as the straw is beaten limp, and through each doorway comes a straw rope, increasing in length as the boy who is twisting it retires across the street and into the fields beyond. The street is for the time impassable; but as the whole village works as a community, each member feeling a keen interest in the affairs of his neighbour, no one would dream of wanting a clear road at that particular time. The immense balls of straw rope that are formed at this time would seem to be a heritage from some age of giants.

In the stripped bog lands banks of turf between the fields replace the stone walls, and the cottages, too, are patched as it were with sods of turf. Mud floors are more common, and are more difficult to clean than the flagstones; but the stalls for

A 'SIDE CAR.

the cow and litter for the pigs are there as before. Sometimes these cabins have no window at all! In all of them a large bed takes up a portion of the living-room.

The very poorest cabins are without window or chimney. There is no fireplace, and such smoke from the turf fire as does not fill the room goes out into the air by a hole in the roof. Occasionally an attempt is made to produce a kind of chimney by pushing an empty barrel through the roof.

In this poor land nothing but manuring can make the soil fertile, and the people are too poor for that. In days gone by they have at times fetched better soil up from other parts on their backs, and spread it about by their own hands; too often, however, have the fruits of their labours been wrested from them by grasping hands.

It was to help these dwellers on the stone lands, the stripped bogs, and the lonely glens, that the Congested Districts Board first came into being, and the tragedy of dull, grinding life merging into slow starvation and death can be better learnt from the terse statements of an unromantic Blue-book than from all the rhetoric of an impassioned appeal.

The terse statements are simply records of the receipts and expenditure of a dozen typical families living in the poor part of Ireland now

generally known as the "Congested Districts." It will be sufficient to quote three:

No. 1.—Receipts and Expenditure of a Family in *Comparatively Good Circumstances*, the Receipts being derived from Agriculture and Fishing.

Receipts.

	£	s.	d.
Sale of 20 cwts. of oats at 4s. 6d. per cwt.	4	10	0
,, 4 tons potatoes at 33s. 4d. per ton ...	6	13	4
,, two two-year-old calves	12	0	0
,, three pigs (profit)	4	10	0
,, a foal	5	0	0
,, eggs	7	10	0
,, butter	1	0	0
,, ten lambs at 8s. each	4	0	0
,, fish	3	0	0
	£48	3	4

Expenditure.

	£	s.	d.
Rent	4	0	0
County Cess	0	8	0
Clerical charges	1	0	0
Clothes	12	0	0
Meal	3	10	0
Flour	4	16	0
Groceries	6	11	0
Tobacco	2	12	0
Spades, etc.	0	10	0
Light	1	0	0
Household utensils, etc.	0	15	0
	£37	2	0

Home produce consumed by the family is valued at about £10.

There are tables giving the same details about families in *ordinary* circumstances, where the receipts are about £27 a year, and in *poor* circumstances, where the receipts are about £17 a year. Lastly there is one of a family so poor that it can scarcely be said to live.

No. 12.—Receipts and Expenditure of a Family in the *Poorest Possible Circumstances*, the Receipts being derived from Agriculture and Labour in the Locality.

Receipts.

	£	s.	d.
Eggs	1	3	0
Sixty days' labour at 1s. per day	3	0	0
Breeding cattle	4	0	0
	£8	3	0

Expenditure.

	£	s.	d.
Rent	1	0	0
County Cess	0	2	0
Meal	5	17	0
Clothing	0	10	0
Groceries	4	0	0
	£11	9	0

Home produce consumed by the family is valued at about £6.

In some of the tables appear migratory earnings of men or the children's earnings as servants, with here and there miscellaneous sales of kelp, butter, fish, or fowl. Nowhere does fresh meat appear in the family budget, though fish and bacon figure

as an occasional luxury. Bacon seems to be regarded more in the light of a relish for the bread than as a real food. Tobacco appears in all but the very poorest budgets, and snuff in several, and it must be remembered that women—at least the older ones—enjoy a pipe as much as the men.

It is easily seen that numbers of these people live in circumstances where they could not possibly earn enough for themselves, no matter how they improve the cultivation of the lands. So one of the Board's chief works was to persuade some to move to bigger holdings, and to throw together several small plots until the result became just large enough for a family to live on.

As for their houses, they are helped to improve some, and to replace such as are merely mud-hovels. The Government, in the Census returns, classifies the houses in Ireland, and in the lowest class it puts those which are built of "mud or other perishable material, having only one room and window." In the year 1911, scattered over the country, there were more than five thousand of these still occupied, some having no window at all. Some of them in tourist resorts will probably be kept as long as possible, to be exhibited as curiosities to the visitors. Their life, however, in the nature of things cannot be very long, for when once the roof is damaged a heavy storm will soon wash away the mud walls.

OUT IN THE WEST : LETTERFRACK.

CHAPTER VII

COUNTRY CUSTOMS

There is one thing that no traveller in the less frequented parts of Ireland can ever fail to notice, and that is the delightful sense of hospitality which the people possess. In many villages it is quite impossible to find a place to get food. In towns, too, one misses the convenience of a confectioner; you have a choice between a spacious hotel which is expensive, and a small one which is distinctly uninviting; but anything in the nature of a pleasant resort for a light meal is almost unknown. Even in Killarney there is absolutely nothing in the nature of a tea-shop.

In some places it must be confessed that there is some difficulty about the choice of a hotel, and there was one town where we were quite sure that whichever one we chose we should have wished we had gone to the other. We had to insist on several alterations in the equipment provided, and a humorous Dublin friend explained matters by suggesting that perhaps we had not timed our visit when it was the "month for the

clean sheets," and that our demands had upset the ordinary sequence of events in the hotel management. But many a spot of great interest or beauty is situated far from a town or from any inn that is at all possible. Sometimes the car-driver, who is always a man of resource, will leave his horse to graze on the wayside grass while he darts off to some small farmhouse from which he will return with a jug of milk and a cup or two. The milk is, however, given to you, not sold, and all you can do is to accept it in the spirit in which it is given.

Once after visiting some of the famous antiquities of which the Dingle Peninsula is so full, we took shelter from a sudden storm in the little post-office of Ballydavid. The post-mistress, who seemed to be able to talk to our driver in Gaelic and to us in English at one and the same time, invited us to her parlour.

Then she set before us a charming country tea, and entertained us all the while. But not a suggestion as to payment would she listen to. And she carried her hospitality so far as to personally escort us a mile or so along the bay while the car went round by the road, so that we might get a fresh glimpse of Brandon Head and the Sybil Cliffs standing out clearly after the storm, while the blue water of the bay sparkled with special brilliance in the western sunlight. The post-

mistress was a type of her race; hospitality was a part of her creed, and she dispensed it with a charm of manner that put everyone at their ease.

Another instance recurs to me. We had driven from Galway with a little note to an old lady who still used the art of spinning. The graciousness with which she and her family welcomed us cannot be overdrawn. Nothing was too much trouble, and she would have spun for hours for us had we so wished. It was a great grief to her that the heavy wooden loom upon which her husband wove the "homespun" could not be moved from its dark corner and so enable us to photograph it in the light.

We were not allowed to depart without being served with fresh milk and biscuits in the parlour, and the little grandson of two insisted on putting into our hands little packets of sweets. Even at that early age he was showing that he belonged to a nation of gentle people. Our driver had apparently been receiving hospitality of a different kind, for we drove back to Galway at an alarming pace, and he carried on a conversation with himself or the horse all the way.

Some of the people who live in lonely cabins up the mountain valleys become very nervous. Synge describes one poor woman who lived by herself in one of the Wicklow glens.

"I do be so afeard of the tramps," she said.

"I live all alone, and what would I do at all if one of them lads was to come near me?" Then listening to a distant sound she added:

"Do you think its thunder we'll be having? There's nothing I fear like the thunder. Often when I do be excited with the thunder I do be afeared I might die there alone in the cottage and no one know it. But I do hope that the Lord—bless His Holy Name!—has something in store for me!"

The fate of an old woman when "himself" dies is very hard, for it is seldom that many of the family stay at home. America and the towns have more to offer than a tiny holding in the glens.

Synge describes one who was in great distress, and told him her cares with great weeping and wailing.

"The poor old man is after dying on me," she said, with that curious use of the word "on" common all over Ireland to mean some hurt or injury, "and he was great company. There's only one son left me now, and we do be killed working. Ah! Avourneen, the poor do have great stratagems to keep in their little cabins at all. And did you ever see the like of the place we live in? Isn't it the poorest, lonesomest, wildest, dreariest bit of a hill a person ever passed a life on?" Her description, given in the simple and expressive language which poor and

COAST NEAR SLEA HEAD AND THE BLASKET ISLANDS.

rich in Ireland seem to possess, gives a true picture of the life of a lonely widow.

Another woman was complaining that she had no fences to her bit of farm: "The calves do be straying, and the geese do be straying, and the hens do be straying, and I'm destroyed running after them," she said. "We've no man in the place since 'himself' died in the winter, and he ailing these five years, and there's no one to give us a hand drawing the hay or cutting the bit of oats we have above on the hill," which gives a somewhat different picture but contains the same fundamental idea.

The very poor cannot even afford to buy matches, and so they still keep up the very old custom of saving some of the fire each night to start the next day's flame. It is the last act the man performs during the day; after it comes the night and darkness. So as he "spared" the little bit of glowing embers and covered it up with dry turf and ashes, he said a short prayer which is always somewhat in this form:

"I save this fire,
As Christ once saved all.
May Brigid care and keep it,
On Mary's high Son I call.
The three angels most mighty
In Heaven's hall
Protect us, this house,
Until day shall dawn."

There is always the idea that the house shall be guarded—sometimes the prayer that "no dead may ever leave it nor living be wounded in it," and nearly always a reference to St. Bridget—spelt Brigidt in Ireland. There was a Bridge in pagan times, who seems to have been a goddess of fire. As is generally the case, the myth of the pagan Bridget did not die with the arrival of Christianity; it took on a Christian cloak, and the cult of the saint kept up some of the attributes of the previous pagan. So the story of St. Bridget gives her a fiery pillar over her head, a wet cloak supported by the sun's rays, and makes her—in company with nineteen other maidens, transformed into nuns—watch over a perpetual fire which produces no ashes.

"Fire is the holiest thing of all," thinks the Irish peasant (and he is not alone in that belief), and so on the King of Fire's great day at Midsummer, now known as St. John's Eve, if you walk three times round the fire you will be safe from disease for the rest of the year. But do not take away a burning sod from a house on May Day or on Churning Day, because that is like taking away the blessing of the house, and evil will befall its inmates.

On the other hand, if there is a little baby so beautiful that you know the fairies want to steal it, take a hot coal and draw a circle of fire with it

at night round the cradle. This will break the fairy power and the baby will be safe.

The warm hearth of the home is the bright centre to which the peasants turn from the rain and mist with which they are so familiar; it symbolizes everything that they hold dear, as well as retaining the idea of sanctity always associated with fire. For this reason an eviction, especially in the west, is to these people such a terrible heart-breaking thing, and the woman, driven from her hearth, fills the air with wild imprecations. Her curses rain on the hated police till her few possessions have been carried out. Then she sits down, with her head buried in her shawl, and sways to and fro in sorrow.

There is an occasional extra contributor to the joy of the hearth. A bottle of poteen will often be taken from its hiding-place—for its presence must be concealed lest tales go abroad and the police come to search for it—and cheer the men of the household who are busy with the mending of their nets or the fashioning of barrels for their fish.

Poteen-making, however, is not what it was, and many a household complains of the decrease in its riches since the police and excise officers have become more vigilant. They tell of the times when they could keep their still busy and turn out many a gallon of this whisky with never a penny of duty to pay. It is true the police would come

along sometimes, but they were then understanding folk and not above liking a bottle of poteen themselves. So if they confiscated an occasional small store, that was enough for merit, and the still soon made up for it. But now merit is not so easily acquired, and they must needs confiscate the whole of the illicit whisky and what is more, take away the still as well. The whisky could be replaced, for are there not plenty of potatoes? But what can you do without a still? So it is that only in some quiet mountain nook with stones and boulders to provide a hiding-place can the exciting old trade be carried on, the landscape being watched, lest some stray wanderer may catch sight of the tell-tale smoke of the peat-fire beneath the still.

CHAPTER VIII

BEYOND GALWAY

The primitive habits and customs of the Atlantic border are naturally most persistent in the islands of which there are such myriads off the western coast, and perhaps specially so in the Aran Isles. These are thirty miles from Galway, so there is just sufficient difficulty about intercourse with the mainland to prevent any rapid changes in the home life of the people.

For one thing, they can all speak Irish, and this can be heard in its full vigour when anything of interest is going on at Kilronan Pier. A great event is the shipping of the young cattle for a mainland fair, when all the men and women of the island who possess a bullock or two come down, driving them to the pier, and all those who possess none come to watch the proceedings of the others—to watch, too, with freely expressed criticism. The cattle have to be slung from the pier on to the hooker if the tide is such that the hooker can make fast to the pier, but if the tide is low there is much more entertainment. Then the

curraghs come into play, and each tows out a bullock from the shore by a rope fastened to its horns. The animals frequently make wild efforts to escape, and catching them for this preliminary part of their voyage is no easy matter. It is fortunate for the actors that they are used to the free criticism of their womenfolk and neighbours, otherwise the storm of approval or derision that greets their efforts might make them too nervous and add to the difficulty of their job. As it is, however, bullock after bullock is towed out of its depth and made to swim forty or fifty yards till it is hoisted on board by a rope from the masthead. Then the dripping beast is lowered into the hold and its rope sling is removed to be put on the next. Several hookers are filled in turn, carrying the cattle as tightly packed as possible, and finally taking off the owner. A woman of his family generally goes too; for the money gained by the cattle must be brought back to Aranmore and not be lessened by the temptations of Galway.

There is no grass to speak of on the Aran Islands—the fields are often like the bare rock, so the horses are sent out to graze in Connemara during the summer. They, too, are slung into the hold by the rope strap, and the men on board have the added work of guiding the legs of the struggling beast, lest it kick and damage the horses already shipped. The return is easier. The

hooker comes as near to the shore as she can; a horse is hoisted on to the deck, and driven overboard by shouts and flickings. In an instant the men in a curragh dexterously catch it by the halter and tow it into its depth or thereabouts, after which they leave it to continue its journey unaided to the shore while they go back to deal with another. Perhaps there is more fuss over the pigs than over anything else, for the screaming and wailing they set up, when about to be embarked, is more like the cry of a suffering crowd of human beings than anything else. The poor beasts do not have a good time, for they are taken out to the steamer in curraghs, and to prevent them from damaging the thin canvas of the little boats their feet are all tied together, which process calls forth shrieks of anguish. This excites the crowd, and a wild hubbub results.

In these Isles both men and women are attired in the homespun clothes which are fast disappearing from the more frequented spots. The women all wear red petticoats of the wool from their own sheep, spun and dyed with madder at home, and woven by a neighbour in Kilronan for a few pence a yard. Their thick stockings are also made of homespun wool, which the women dip into a pot of indigo till they get it a rich dark blue. Some of the indigo yarn is woven into a sort of flannel for the men's clothes, and sometimes it is mixed

with threads of natural light brown wool into a kind of bluish grey. As the wool and yarn are home-made and weaving is cheap, both men and women are well-clad and wear many garments. The flannel of the women's petticoats is a very different thing from any flannel that can be bought in England. It is very thick, and sometimes is woven in such a way that a sort of woollen fluff is left all over the inside making it very warm. The usual plaid shawl covers their shoulders and is tied round their chests. Sometimes they wear a thick natural wool shawl over their heads, with a brown border for decoration.

The most curious articles in the dress of these Islanders are the "pampooties" which they wear instead of boots. They are cut in one piece from an untanned cow-skin, are low at the sides, and are laced up in the front and back. Their softness enables their wearers to spring about among the rocks with marvellous security and agility, the toes in this protection being able to do some of the clinging work for which Nature designed them. It is a common thing to see a cow-skin hanging up in the roof of the kitchen ready for use as required.

Many of the utensils used are made at home, and because of that they give to these cottages a touch of simple beauty. Pottery is not one of the arts here—there is no clay to bake—so wooden basins and tubs take the place of earthenware. The

CONNEMARA.

men build their own curraghs and repair the spinning-wheels which their grandfathers built, while their nets and fishing-tackle hang about the kitchen in picturesque confusion.

You seldom see a clock inside a house, and there are no sundials outside—in fact, these people pay little heed to time. Their meals are by no means fixed feasts, and they seem to have something to eat whenever they come in. Their food is of the simplest kind—chiefly potatoes with a little salt bacon or fish. There is, of course, bread, but very little fresh meat. Some of the old people would not eat fresh meat if it were given to them, so unaccustomed are they to it. In recent years tea and sugar have been added to the rather poor list, and tea, well stewed, is drunk by everyone, even by little children of two.

The potato which they boil in its skin is the chief food here, as in all the poor parts of Ireland, and wherever it will grow it is planted; on wet days the young and old will spend all the daylight hours in weeding them. At other times, when the sea is too rough for fishing and other work is at a standstill, the members of a family will make a new field on the face of some bare rock. Clay is dug up from one part, sand from another, while donkeys carry panniers full of them to the chosen ledge of rock, where the two kinds of earth are mixed with seaweed, and

spread out to form a fertile layer much in the same way as the Hollanders treat the barren bed of their reclaimed polders, but on a more limited scale.

Here, as in every other part of Ireland, the favourite drink of the men is porter, and this is brought over from the mainland by the steamer, together with the flour for their bread—for they grow no wheat on their grudging rock—and the salt they need for their fish-curing. There is always a race between the curraghs when the steamer comes in, if she cannot unload at the pier. Each tries to get the best place for receiving her cargo, and hopes to return to the shore as heavily laden as safety will allow, and possibly a sporting inch or two deeper.

Often there are curraghs in from the other islands, and the temptation of a new supply of porter keeps the men late. Then a rise in the wind and an unsteady crew means an anxious time of waiting for the womenfolk at home. Sometimes the curragh comes to shore the next day whole and dry, but empty; sometimes it is upset, and a week or two later there is talk of a body washed up on the shores of Galway with pampooties on his feet. Then his clothing is sent home for identification; but before that there are terrified whisperings among those who have lost their sons, and a low keen of misery goes up from each of the bereaved homes.

CHAPTER IX

WORKERS IN THE COUNTRY

It is a common enough sight on the highways of Donegal to meet little groups of women in bright home-dyed skirts carrying large bundles of socks. The women have knitted these at home, and are on their way to deliver them to the agent who will supply them with a fresh bundle of yarn for fresh work. Often the women have to tramp a very long way, sometimes as much as sixteen Irish miles (and an Irish mile is a mile and a quarter), for there are only a few people giving out work over a large district. This hand-knitting is poorly paid work, for the women often get no more than three halfpence a pair, and seldom is anyone quick enough to knit more than a pair or, possibly, three socks in a day. The stockings work out at a similar rate, and a girl working from eight in the morning till eight or ten o'clock at night can earn something between three halfpence and fourpence. It is not to be wondered at, that the workers live in cabins scarcely habitable.

A woman who can get a knitting-machine is

rather better off, for she can make a dozen or more pairs of socks in a day and earn a shilling for them. The Congested Districts Board has helped many a family by providing them with the machine and letting them gradually pay off the cost, which it is impossible for them to save up in advance. It also provides teachers to instruct them in the use and management of the machines. In this way a young woman could earn from five to eight shillings a week; but it must be remembered that if she lives far off, she must spend about one day a week in fetching the yarn and in returning the finished work. Sometimes with even these low rates she is not sure how much she will get, and her remark that "Shure indeed it would be unmannerly to ask the price" shows how high is the Irish standard in manners, when even the very poor will prefer to drop a few pence a week nearer to starvation rather than depart from it.

In all the little shops of the towns and villages, along with the groceries and drapery in the windows and on the shelves, there can be seen piles of linen to be embroidered. These are sent down from Belfast ready stamped with patterns, blouses and bed-spreads, cushion-covers and handkerchiefs, much of the work being of the finest description, requiring all the skill and artistic power for which the Donegal workers are famous. The people call this work "sprigging,"

and on the arrival of a batch from Belfast they flock to the agents to select the work they like. They often keep quite a stock of work at home in their little cabins. They get about sevenpence a dozen for "sprigging" handkerchiefs, and can manage to get through about a dozen a day. They will initial them at a halfpenny each, and manage to do about ten in the day. A bed-spread, taking about a week and a half, gives them 7s., and by working nine days on a lady's skirt they can earn 5s. That is what they can earn now, with oil-lamps to help out the winter light; but it is not so long since they could only crouch on the floor and do their sprigging by the flickering light of a "bog" fire. Many an old woman cannot earn more than 3d. or 6d. a day, and, indeed, a shilling is considered a splendid amount for anyone. Little as the money is, however, these poor women do not always receive that. The agents keep shops, and the wages are taken out in goods—at least, no work is given unless the wages are left at the shop, so that if the actual coin is handed to the worker, it is a mere formality, and it is expected back in the till again at once. As a worker once said:

"Out of friendship we might be gettin' a little coin," but the event is rare.

"Shure it is only with a great squeeze that we'd get any money at all," added another. And so, as

a fellow-worker said, "There's many a poor mother and girl who has to buy articles she doesn't want, and have no money for what they want for other things." It is a profitable thing to keep an agency when it brings thirty or forty people a day into the shop, and here again the charm of manner and mind of these poor women acts to their hurt. They regard it as unmannerly and ungenerous to take their wages away.

"Indade, and it's ashamed I'd be not to lave my wages at the shop," said one. "It would be ugly to go to another shop." Sometimes the yarn for knitting is sent out by cart into the country districts, and the cart is piled up with little packets of tea and sugar with which to pay the wages. Most of the shops do not deal in flour and meal, so these things, the real necessaries of life, are not given in place of money. This paying out of wages in the form of goods, or "truck," as it is called, presses, in spite of the law against it, with terrible hardship on the workers, and many a priest denounces the system from the altar.

There is another hardship under which these people suffer: they labour always under a load of debt to the shops, and this is common practically everywhere in Ireland—at least, in all the poorer parts. Very little ready money is possessed by anyone, and barter is the common form of trade. The shopkeeper has the upper hand in

this, of course, and will sometimes exact twelve or sixteen eggs in return for a quarter of a pound of tea! The little money which all families need to procure them the flour, meal, and other necessaries, without which they cannot live, is obtained in different ways. Only those near the coast can fish or burn kelp, but all can find some members of the family who can, if so minded, sell their labour to other employers. They begin this when very young; quite small children will be hired out to look after a cow or goat, and, with sublime indifference to school, will spend five or six months in the summer for a total wage of 30s. or so. When a little older they will go out as farm-servants for the same period, and return home in the autumn with anything between £5 and £6.

The biggest contributions, however, come from the stalwart men of the family, who go off to Scotland and England, and, bestowing their attention upon Perthshire potatoes or Worcestershire wheat, manage to keep themselves employed for several months, and return home with from £12 to £20. Nearly all the labourers, who leave their homes in great numbers in June, come from Connaught, and most of these from the beautiful neighbourhood of the Killery. The potato-fields of Stirling and Perth must seem colourless indeed to them after the red glow of the fuchsia hedges which flourish on their warm home shores.

The most interesting of the migratory groups comes from Achill, that desolate but fascinating island on the west of Connemara, where the famous cathedral cliffs of Duport rise sheer from the sea, and where seals still live in the caves. Achill sends not only her men but her women, too—in fact, the women sometimes outnumber the men, and within the last year or two some adventurous women from Kerry and Donegal have been following their example, so that some thousand Irish women find annual employment amongst the potatoes of Ayrshire and the West of Scotland.

The Achill workers are the only ones who cling to a sort of family idea, and work in related, or at least friendly, groups—old men, lads and women—but of late years the groups contain fewer full-grown men. They are organized into squads under a sort of tribal chief, and are engaged for the season by the potato merchants. They go in pairs to the fields; one forks up the potatoes, the other gathers them in a basket, and they get about 15s. a week each. A third man empties the baskets into barrels, and earns slightly more, and a still more fortunate man is he who prepares the barrels for shipping. This tribal chief, who is more generally known as the "gaffer," gets as much as 30s. a week, and, what is more to the point, gets his wages irrespective of weather—a good fortune, which does not fall to the lot of

A STREET IN KILLARNEY.

the field-workers, who are only paid for the time actually worked ; the weather, they reckon, cheats them out of a day's wage a week. For the rest of the time they count on ten hours a day work, and it must be assumed that nobody suffers from a weak digestion, or, if he does, he will come off badly, since the longest rest for meals is the half-hour for dinner, and the other breaks are for ten minutes only. Sometimes late in the season a machine is employed in digging up the potatoes, then the women spend their time in picking them up and the men in "pitting" them. Even during the winter a few of the workers are employed in dealing with the pit potatoes, and a few girls are kept on by some of the farmers at 2s. a day in the spring to help with the planting of the early potatoes. This will keep them going till June, when they join the squads again, but very few obtain a full year's work.

The farmers provide these workers with some sort of lodging ; the town merchants who engage them, and are their real employers, contribute blankets, fire and light, and as many potatoes as the workers like to use. They do not, of course, live in luxury, nor do they always keep their quarters as clean as they might. Where they work in families they can manage to do the rest of their living for about 4s. a week, but even when alone they can still manage to save

half a sovereign in a good week, and easily clear £8 to £10 for the season.

The Donegal men—often joined by some of the less conservative men from Achill—prefer a life of greater change and take to harvesting instead of potato gathering. From Stirling and Fife to Galloway and Northumberland they may be found from June to November singling turnips or making hay. Then they turn their attention to the corn harvest, and, lastly, to turnip raising. Gradually, however, the reaping machine replaces the scythe, and the Irish labourer sees the work of his arms done by a "self-binder." It is little wonder, therefore, that before leaving his Emerald Island he should pray for a suitable number of showers to fall upon the mown hay, for then, at least, his arm and fork will be wanted to turn its long rows more than once.

The Connaught men seem to prefer England to Scotland, and lead a roving life. Wherever there is emergency work to be done, there they will go. So they begin to cross over as early as March, though the great exodus is not till June. All remain till November, and some till Christmas. If they work for seven to eight months, they can, with luck, combined with thrift, take back nearly £20 to their family in the home cabin.

Thus it is that the family is accustomed to deal with large sums at irregular intervals—and to live

in debt between times. This is where the shop again comes to the fore. On the strength of the next crop of kelp, or the summer earnings across the Irish Channel, the shop supplies goods on credit. Sometimes the debt is allowed to run up to £20 or £30, and the shopkeeper must be a man of some capital to be able to do this to all his customers. He, in his turn, however, gets goods on credit—in fact, the system of credit prevails throughout the whole country, and few are free from its throttling influence.

The debtor need not fear that he will be summoned for debt unless he is so reckless as to transfer his custom to another shop; in that case retribution soon follows, for the shopkeeper is watchful of his interests. He also deals more leniently with the man who is bringing up a family, for as each child grows up there will be one more worker able to go forth and bring back good Scotch or English gold. The shopkeeper prefers that everything should not be paid off absolutely, as while the customer remains slightly in debt, he is not likely to transfer his custom elsewhere. The women who work at sprigging or knitting for the shops often get goods on credit and pay off their debt by means of their work. This sounds plausible enough, but the people are so poor and illiterate that they really do not know how their repayments are going on. And so it

may happen that a debt of a pound or two may be incurred one day which in three months will be scarcely appreciably decreased.

There is another iniquity from which they suffer. Flour and meal are the essentials of life. They need it as much in the spring, when they have no money, as in the winter, when they have, so they get a bag from the dealer in May at possibly 11s., and pay him 13s. 6d. for it in November. A bag —7 stone—of meal in the spring has 3s. put on its price before the coming autumn, and a ton of bran augments its price by 4s. The people are too ignorant to know what interest they are paying, and scarcely even know the amounts of their debts. The impossibility of getting things at the current price, or even knowing what it is, is shown in the words—full of sorrow—of a poor peasant :

"If you are in hard need, you are glad to get the flour and do not ask the price."

Even in this limit of poverty manners come to the fore.

"How can I be asking the price of the flour I am taking on trust?" said one woman ; and so the unfortunate peasant pays an exorbitant rate of interest. It is called by the fanciful name of "gombeening." The "gombeen" man is often not only a shopkeeper, but owns possibly an hotel and farm as well, has a large flour and

meal business, and is besides all this the controller of the outwork. Who is to understand the complications that arise? The whole system of credit and truck and "gombeening" becomes in such a case so intricate and confused that few people, and certainly not the illiterate peasants, can understand exactly what does go on, and how they are exploited to make the riches of another. Deception is bound to be practised, and as this system affects every class of the community and underlies every human transaction, the seriousness of its moral effect can hardly be overestimated.

It is not only the women and families of Donegal and the West who live under the domination of the shop. Even Belfast and the surrounding districts give plenty of instances of truck tyranny. There was the owner of a dye-works, who thought he would try to augment his income by starting a grocery shop. He succeeded well enough, for his dye-workers patronized his shop, and had the value of their purchases stopped out of their wages. Then there was the owner of a corn and saw mill, who added to his activities by keeping a grocery shop and public-house. Not content with stopping the mill-workers' wages for the amount which they spent themselves, he also took from them the value of all that their *wives* chose to spend!

Perhaps the best story of the way in which the wages of the workers are tampered with comes from a beautiful western spot where the proprietor of the hotel kept a large general shop which included a post-office. This shop served the entire community for miles, and when the owner added to his other activities by starting a hand-weaving industry he expected to pay the workmen's wages in the usual form. He, however, went somewhat further by insisting on the sanctity of family life and preaching the doctrine of the responsibility of the family for the debts of its members. Hence when a certain Patrick expected to receive his weekly wage of 9s., or at least its equivalent, he found nothing to carry away ; his eyes were merely gladdened by the sight of 9s. crossed off his father's debt ! Then came an inspector to whom Patrick and others told their tale. They even wrote it down and solemnly signed it.

So a case was brought.

The little court-house in its wild beautiful surroundings was filled to overflowing when the Resident Magistrate and the four Justices of the Peace took their places.

Patrick and his fellow-workers were called as witnesses.

" How did they receive their wage ?"

" In coin," they answered, to the intense astonishment of the prosecutors.

The witnesses were confronted with their signed statements.

These they waved aside and persisted in swearing that they were regularly paid in coin.

Though every one in the court knew that the employer had always paid his wages in goods from "time immemorial," the solemn farce could only end in a dismissal of the case, for Patrick's change of front was probably due as much to his desire to be "agin the Government" as to the fear of offending his employer.

CHAPTER X

THE CHILDREN

"GIVE us a ha'pinny, miss."

The request came from the mouth of a dark-haired, bright-eyed maiden of about eleven. Destitute of covering at each extremity, she wore something that had once been a frock in between. She carried a baby in one arm, while a smaller but equally ragged edition of herself clung to the tattered remains of an ancient skirt.

A persuasive statue of St. Ursula looked down upon us from a neighbouring building and gave a clue to its use.

"Do you go to that school?" we asked.

"We do, miss," was the reply, given with the invariable avoidance of the Saxon monosyllable.

"Don't the sisters tell you that you ought not to beg?" we continued.

"Indeed they do, miss," is the rather unexpected result of the question; but after a moment's pause comes a very persuasive "Give us a ha'pinny, miss," and we yield up our moral teaching and our halfpence at the same moment.

THE SHANNON AT LIMERICK.

There is an intense fascination about the Irish children which the children of no other country seem to possess. Barefooted, ragged, and often dirty, they possess a charm and grace that transforms them. They have the common heritage of all children—curiosity—but they temper this with an attractive shyness, while inherited breeding bids them be polite when circumstances will allow.

In most places the appearance of a camera is sufficient to make all the boys within a radius of a quarter of a mile gather round, while a few strike attitudes in front of the building in which they see you are interested, and effectively interfere with all your plans. They are only dislodged by strategy. In Ireland, however, things are very different—at least, outside the great industrial centres. The slightest word moves a crowd of curious gazers into the obscurity of the rear, and big boys of fifteen—the veriest demons in England and other Teutonic countries—will politely lend their aid and thank you in the politest manner for merely letting them look at the focussed view.

They have another advantage over the children of other countries: they belong to a race which possesses personal beauty in a most marked degree. It is the first thing that strikes you on the quay at Kingstown (the "Gate of Ireland," as they call it), or the platform in Dublin. In no

other port or city of the British Isles can you see such a collection of good-looking people. They may be old or young or middle-aged—every face has the beauty of well-cut features and clear complexions, or that peculiarly Irish charm which is as attractive as accepted beauty. There is a story that when Henry II. of England had driven the Danes out of Dublin, he presented that depopulated city to his town of Bristol, and forthwith a colony of Saxons from the West went over to take possession. The men of Wicklow, however, felt their sense of beauty outraged by such an incursion, compared the rising generation, to their detriment, with their own children, and forthwith decided that such a deterioration in personal beauty was a national danger to be promptly dealt with. Action at once followed, and such Bristolians who were not buried in Dublin Bay fled back to the city of their birth, where so high a standard of personal beauty was not exacted.

Looking at the Irish children to-day, one is tempted to sympathize with the high-handed mountaineers of Wicklow.

It cannot be said that these attractive young mortals feel a raging thirst for education—in fact, it would seem that they stay away from school whenever they can ; certain it is that of every seven children who should be present at school two are

absent, and more than a quarter of the children of the whole country stop away half the time. Frequently the child's home is as little anxious as the child for the learning that emanates from school, but occasionally a more advanced father attempts to reduce the offences of his truant son.

The other day a scene of disorder was being enacted in the main street of a small town not far from Cork. The hero of the scene was a small boy of about nine, red in the face, tearful, breathless, and howling. As he moved, a streak of red marked his progress along the muddy road, while he was grasped and pushed by a powerful man in the rear. This was obviously the villain of the play—at least, so it appeared to an Englishman in an approaching car. The howls of the boy were mixed with voluble abuse from the man and the jeers of a draggled crowd. Suddenly the boy stumbled forward, the red streak spread into an ominous patch, his yells rose higher, and the man's stick descended on the kicking object. The crowd became more excited, and the Englishman entered the scene. Obviously the boy was injured and ill—perhaps half-murdered ; he must at least be rescued from his tormentors and carried to a doctor. The crowd looked on surprised, but offered no comments as the sobbing, prostrate boy was lifted on to the back of the car and whisked off to the nearest doctor.

The case was explained to him.

"Sure you haven't been long in Ireland," said the man of medicine, after a casual look at the dramatic hero. "It's the very worst truant in the country you're after carrying in your car; and his father was just persuading him to go the road to school."

And as for the red streak—the boy's stockings were of homespun wool which had been dyed in the bowl of madder at home. The rain had done the rest.

The boy had fallen down in a fit of sobbing, not from injury and ill-treatment, but from rage and temper.

And the Englishman who had moved about as a splendid inspiration amongst the lads of South London drove away, realizing that it took more than the proportion of Irish blood in his veins to understand the ways of the Emerald Isle.

Some years ago the Science and Art Department—better known to its friends and enemies as South Kensington—spread its beneficent wings over the sister isle, and warmed by its protective encouragement that nest of intellectual fledglings.

The boys of Ireland struggled with the mysteries of mathematics, or dabbled in the theories of physics and chemistry. Managers wished to demonstrate to the parents and the world the

fulness of the pupils' knowledge. They saw to it that the attendance of every boy was duly registered in a long and narrow book. They also entered into negotiations with South Kensington as to the holding of examinations, and with due solemnity promised that no boy should sit within five feet of any other boy. In due course arrived monster linen envelopes, sixteen inches by twelve, adorned with the large red seals of official integrity.

Now, South Kensington kept a staff of officers, small in number, but mighty in intellect, who numbered among their varied duties that of inspecting the examinations. South Kensington knew by experience the frailty of human nature, estimated the penetrability of those linen envelopes, and realized that a space of even five feet can be bridged. Still, the inspectors were not very many, and could not be at every examination centre at once.

It happened, though, that one evening the May sun was sending the last of its rays from the west upon the heads of a number of boys in the schoolroom of a country town, when the keenest-eyed member of the South Kensington inspectors entered upon the scene. Each boy had in front of him a paper of questions and a book wherein he should enter the results of his inspirations tempered, as a rule, by hazard. The

subject was known as "Mathematics, Part I.," and it might have been expected that each candidate would be engaged in the task of choosing whether he would prefer to dally with a question which alluringly (in brackets) pointed to the possibility of twenty-five marks as its reward, or to venture upon a path of greater security, but with the limit of eight marks.

Each boy's eye was, however, fixed steadily upon the space in front of the desks, and as the Inspector followed the direction of the upturned faces, his gaze was arrested by a large blackboard upon which the schoolmaster was busily engaged in writing out complete solutions of all the problems.

The manager was seated on a small platform by his side. Not one whit abashed by the entry of the Inspector, he rose to greet him with a smile, and took him by the arm with intent to lead him to the "Mulligan Arms."

"I dare say you're wondering phat we're doin'," said the manager. "The thruth is that you people at South Kensington don't ondersthand our Irish bhoys, and so I jist sint for the schoolmaster and tould him to do phat he could to put thim on more of an equality with your London lads."

This was what South Kensington, with tactful euphemism, termed an "irregularity."

Sometimes examination papers furnished in-

ternal evidence of similar irregularities, and then someone had to go and meet the managers with a view to inquiry.

It was on a quest for information that the same Inspector found himself on the railway-station of a southern town prepared for a seven mile drive to the scene of inquiry. It was during the time of the agrarian troubles. Outside the station stood one solitary car, and the Inspector hailed the driver.

"Are you engaged?" he asked.

"I'm not," replied the driver.

"Then drive me to——"

The driver looked at him for a few moments, then:

"Shure I'll not be dhrivin' ye," he answered.

The Inspector, always ready for emergencies, proceeded to parley.

"It isn't far, and I won't keep you long there."

"I'll not be dhrivin' ye," he repeated.

"Why not?" asked the Inspector, with amused curiosity.

The driver replied with another question:

"Phat papers are ye carryin' in yer pockut?"

"Oh, these," said the Inspector, grasping a foolscap packet which protruded several inches from his coat-pocket. "They're examination papers."

"Are ye quoite sure they're not writs?" queried the driver.

"Quite," answered the Inspector. "Here"—pulling them out—"you can see them if you like."

"No! If you till me on yer honour they're not writs, I'll not be disbelaving you," answered Jehu; and the Inspector quickly sprang upon the other seat.

"Ye see," confided the driver as they went away at a swinging pace, "I'm the Prisidint of the Local Branch of the Land Lague, and it wouldn't do for me to be dhrivin' anyone servin' writs."

The school managers awaited the Inspector's arrival.

"It's very unpleasant for me," he began, as he took his seat, "to be coming again about a matter of this kind. It is not the first time that I have had to come to inquire into these irregularities," he went on, with polished official manner and phraseology.

The chairman laid a kindly hand on the younger man's arm. "Don't ye worry," he said; "shure ye do it very noicely. But it's this way, ye see: we're thrying to get all the money we can out of the Governmint, and you South Kinsington folk are thrying to privint us. Sometoimes we win, and sometoimes you do. This time it's your turn; but it's all roight, and don't ye bother about it."

The proceedings that followed, said the Inspector, were distinctly unofficial.

South Kensington had not before realized that its examinations were only a game, with its grant as the stakes—to be won at all costs.

Many of the children near the towns of the linen industry have to work at home after school hours, and under miserable conditions, some of the houses being such that they are unfit to harbour young children at any time. The children have been found sitting up drawing threads of linen till after ten o'clock at night. Thread-drawing was formerly done in the factory, but it gradually drifted into the homes of the workers, and the children were naturally then pressed into service. Of course, the children do not do it so well as their elders, so that the pay for the work has decreased, until now it is scarcely worth more than a penny an hour, and a woman makes no more at this rate, assisted by the growing family, than she did when a higher standard was expected and paid for, and she did the work herself.

There was a father who conceived the economic plan of making his family self-supporting by means of this thread-drawing. It was true that he himself earned 25s. a week as a hand-loom-weaver when he chose to work, but he preferred to keep that for himself. So the mother and children rose daily at 4 a.m. and drew threads

for handkerchiefs till their tired eyes fell asleep at night; but even at nine o'clock they had not finished, for it takes a great deal of thread-drawing to buy even the flour for a whole family, and there is peat to be thought of, too. So when a little girl of twelve was found straining her eyes at half-past nine, the father was prosecuted and fined 10s.—rather less than half his week's pocket-money! This case, however, stirred up public opinion, and shortly afterwards another man was found—even worse—and was removed from his family for a short time at His Majesty's expense.

Children are supposed to stay at school until they are fourteen, unless they can produce a certificate to show that they are unusually proficient below that age.

Girls of thirteen have a very neat way of managing their "proficiency certificates" in a certain town in the North of Ireland. When they have "passed" Standard IV. (really suitable for children of ten or eleven), they ask their teacher to give them a certificate to say that they are "enrolled" in Standard V.; if the teacher declines, he is waited on by the rest of the child's family, and his life is made a burden to him till he does. Off goes the child to a factory, where, anxious to get cheap labour, the manager does not pay much attention to the wording of the certificate, and the child can earn from 9s. to 12s. a

week (nearly as much as a woman) almost immediately. All is well, unless a factory inspector comes along, and lets official curiosity lead her into awkward discoveries.

But even these things fade before the horrors of the half-time system, and there are about 4,000 half-timers in Belfast. By that system children of twelve, who are passed by the certifying surgeons as fit for work, are allowed to go into the mills for two days and a half a week, working there ten hours a day in a damp atmosphere. The rest of the time they put in at school—too tired to learn.

Gradually the long hours in the damp mill do their work on the under-fed, ill-clad child; and a few months after they have been certified as "fit for work" they are broken down in health, often with diseased eyes, and incapable of any further effort. A pathetic account of a little girl is given by Miss Martindale in the Factory Report of 1907. Although the child was nearly thirteen, her weight was only 57 pounds, and her height 47 inches—30½ pounds and 11 inches below what it should have been. She was, physically, behind the standard of a child of nine. Ill-cared for in every way, she was unfit for most work, especially lifting heavy weights, yet her work as a "cager" caused her to move about a "cage" weighing 28 pounds after filling it with bobbins, which she obtained by kneeling on the

damp floor of the spinning-room. The child did her work barefooted and clad only in a cotton chemise, a skirt, and a "jumper," which last is a short-sleeved, cotton bodice, cut low at the neck. It is not to be wondered at that she complained of headache on mill days, or that she was laid up with "mill fever" within three months of starting this work. Although nearly thirteen, she was only in the second standard at her school—*i.e.*, level with ordinary children of eight, and the 4s. 6d. a week which she earned on half-time went to supply her parents with drink. In spite of the terrible life she led, she had kept her pretty manners, and loved nothing better than to hear one of the beautiful old myths of fairies or heroes.

Children of ten or eleven often do the entire work of the house, and stay away from school to do it. Or their occupation may be varied by letting them go to school during the morning and afternoon, and making them do the housework before and afterwards. But that system, unfortunately, prevails in other places besides Ireland, and presses generally hardest on the girls.

The newspaper boys in some of the big cities seldom attend school, and the parents do not mind occasional "proceedings," for these can only be taken every two months at most, and even if they are fined 5s.—that is as much as it can be (and there is always the hope that a wheedling tongue

will effect a reduction) — they can afford that amount in return for the 10s. or 11s. brought in every week by the boy.

In many parts of Ireland there is no compulsory education, and, indeed, education is little valued. There are, furthermore, no attendance officers, so that when an Irish family migrates into one of the more prosaic, serious-minded English towns, there is considerable disillusionment in the matter of school attendance.

"I'm jist afther bringin' my little Bridget to ye," said one of these migrating mothers to the headmistress of a large infants' school in Manchester.

Inquiries showed that Bridget was already six, so the mistress expressed astonishment that she had been to no school before.

"Be shure you send her punctually every day," said the mistress, closing the admission register.

"Shure she'll not be wantin' to come ivery day," was the answer. And Bridget showed so little desire to worry about such extraneous matters as punctuality and regularity, that a stalwart officer, impressive in all the glory of a braided uniform, had to teach Bridget's mother that Manchester insists upon all the children within her border assimilating the education which she provides.

Bridget's grandmother could tell tales of the times when schools were held in all sorts of strange

corners, some of them under little more than the shelter of some shed or hedge. Whether anyone learned anything or not was often a matter of luck, for books and equipment were not lavish. So when it happened that the only reading-book had to be passed from scholar to scholar down the class, the last one stood a poor chance.

One such scholar is made to say (in "Father Tom of Connemara"): "Before the book reached me, it was time always to ate the dinners; and when we started again in the afternoon, it was the same thing. Before me turn came round it was time to go home, for on account of the t'ree mile of a lonely mountain-road before me I had to lave early. I t'ought that the master might have started sometimes at the foot, to give me a chance, but I suppose he niver t'ought of it."

In the North-Irish schools, attended by the half-timers, it happens that these are so unable to keep up with the work of their full-time schoolfellows that they are generally put down a class; so a girl who is in Standard V. when she sets off for the mill is within a few weeks degraded to Standard IV., and runs little risk of rising out of it again during her remaining years at school. But, indeed, most of the half-timers are far below this, some of them are even as low as Standard I. Frequently the schools themselves are not attractive, but the little inmates are, of course, quick

and intelligent. Their ability to read and write, however, is so limited that it would seem likely that many of them would soon forget the little they know. Their life is a hard one, but the children themselves never complain, and in the ungarnished pages of the Factory Report are quoted Chesterton's words: "We learn of the cruelty of some school or factory child from journalists, we learn it of doctors, we learn it from inspectors, we learn it even from shame-stricken schoolmasters and repentant sweaters; but we never learn it from the children, never from the victims. It would seem as though the living creature had to be taught the art of crying out when it is hurt."

CHAPTER XI

LONG AGO

The peat bog, which gives the Irish peasant of to-day the chief need of his daily life, has supplied the historian with the most telling testimony as to the primitive Irishman of centuries ago. The peat bog has, in fact, hidden and preserved the actual records of long ago better than any museum; it has made the Irish past speak its own history with an array of indisputable facts where other nations have to depend on theory and surmise. Less than a century ago, when men were busy with conjectures as to the kind of man in Ireland many thousands of years back, how he lived and what he wore, the peat bog with dramatic point cast upon a wondering world a complete specimen of a primitive Irishman. Diggers in the peat had come upon him at a depth of ten feet, and in that preserving ooze he had lain for countless years clad as when he first fell asleep. His long hair and beard showed him as one of a dark race, and his perfect teeth told of his fleshy food. His entire dress was of skins, which were sewn together

FISHING-BOATS, GALWAY.

with wonderfully neat stitches of gut, and he fastened it on with leather laces. The skin cap, which he wore on his head, and the mocassins which covered his feet, have been found in numbers, so that every detail is known of the dress of the early race which lived in caves, the men of which with roughly chipped pieces of flint, got their food by killing animals scarcely more savage than themselves. They were not very particular persons, and it did not matter to them whether they dropped the bones of their animals on the floor of the cave after they had eaten the flesh, or whether they threw them outside. But certain it is that they let all sorts of bones and dirt accumulate, and, as their descendants lived in the same cave, this went on till great heaps of rubbish were formed. It is not to be wondered at that they lost many a flint in the rubbish and had to chip new ones. It is fortunate for us that they did, for many of these heaps—or middens—are still left, and those who dig into them find many a treasure of the past.

Low down in the heaps the flint tools or "celts are of the rudest description, but higher up they are better formed, showing that as the centuries rolled by this primitive man learnt better how to adapt his tools to his purpose. Sometimes, too, he must have filled up a leisure hour or two by sitting at the door of his cave and ornamenting

his implements. He became skilful in smoothing his flints and in using one sharp tool to make circles and other curious marks on another. Or he would scrape similar marks on a chipped piece of bone and give it to his wife for a hair ornament. Some of his tools were of beautiful form, and so smooth that it must have taken wonderful skill and patience to make them with nothing else to work with but pieces of flint.

Gradually from somewhere or other he gained the knowledge of metals, and, first in copper and then in bronze, he copied the implements that he had found so useful in stone. Perhaps it was another race that came to the land and brought the new ideas, perhaps he discovered them for himself. At any rate, he put the same circles and other ornamentations on the bronze weapons that his artistic sense had led him to design on the flint.

With the Bronze Age there begin to be echoes of far-off battles and the grouping of men into families and clans. They made themselves long leaf-shaped swords, and also curved weapons for battle, which were heavy and thick, and shaped like a scythe. They ornamented the blades of their swords with wonderful engraving, and studded the hilts with gold, and even with glistening stones. But the curious thing is that the same patterns recurred again in the costly products made at the dawn of history as had been evolved in the age of

stone, as though some innate Irish feeling forced itself into expression through all the ages. Those beautiful patterns can be seen all over the country, whether on the carvings on the wonderful stones at New Grange, or on the weapons of warfare preserved in the museums. They persisted on the crosses of the early saints, and even in the manuscripts of the ancient monks. They have enabled ancient Irish art to stand apart, and caused its manuscripts to be amongst the most beautiful of the world's productions.

About the same time as they discovered the use of copper and bronze the primitive Irishmen learnt to spin and weave. The bog which has proved equal to any national museum has again produced a well preserved specimen of an early wearer of woven clothes. His early efforts in colour produced plaids, and of these he wore a garment somewhat akin to Turkish trousers, with a tunic above, very wide round the knee ; above all came a very full and graceful cloak of beautiful soft cloth. These cloaks were often very valuable ; some were edged with gold, and so it was a common thing for the people to use them in payment of tribute to their kings. In fact, tribute was nearly always paid either in dress or cattle.

A curious point is known about the dress of these early Irishmen. They loved colour and gorgeous decoration, and in their early laws it was

decreed that many colours should only be worn by royal personages. A slave was only allowed to have one colour in his dress, and a soldier two. A young lord could wear three, a poetess five, and a poet six. The seven colours allowed to the queen gave her wonderfully embroidered robes, and each one was worth seven cows. The robes of the chief poet were fixed in value as the worth of five cows, and those of the poetess as three cows. All these points were dealt with in the famous old Brehon Laws, which were chanted to the people from the top of certain hills by the Brehons themselves.

The dress of the poet shows how high he ranked; indeed, from the very earliest times of which we have any records the Irish nation esteemed learning more than any other race has ever done. Amongst all learned men—philosophers, doctors, orators, musicians—the poet ranked highest, and one very learned King put up a college for these wise men, or Ollamhs, at Tara near his own palace.

The chief poet had to know 350 poems by heart, whilst the lower followers contented themselves with half that number. A poet had to recite these at any festival when called upon by the King. They received magnificent salaries and wore magnificent robes, and altogether were a very powerful body. The poems which they recited were really the historic narratives of their country, and their

education, which lasted a dozen years, consisted chiefly in learning the historic stories, as well as immense genealogies and chronological lists of important events. They were bound by their laws to preserve their history and to teach it to the people; there were even special Ollamhs whose business was to preserve the records of passing events. As the rights of property absolutely depended upon the past history and knowledge of genealogies, it can be easily seen how important the Ollamh was, and it was no wonder that he lost all his salaries and privileges if he ever falsified his historical knowledge or altered the genealogy of any family. It is no wonder, when we consider how important was the position of the Ollamhs as historians, that their tales should always have been considered as of the highest authority. No one could be a Brehon or judge who had not first qualified as an Ollamh; no one, in fact, could hold any high position unless he had a vast knowledge of his nation's past and present.

The result of this ancient bardic eminence is that the Irish can trace back their history into times about which all other nations are supremely ignorant. Mr. Standish O'Grady puts the matter simply in these words: "There is not a conspicuous sepulchral monument in Ireland the traditional history of which is not recorded in our ancient literature and of the heroes in whose

honour they were raised. In the rest of Europe there is not a single barrow, dolmen, or cist, of which the ancient traditional history is recorded; in Ireland there is hardly one of which it is not."

There is hardly a plain or hill, a bay or headland around which does not cluster some romance which pagan or Christian imagination has not woven into a legend; and, indeed, no country in the world has preserved more legends about special spots than Ireland. But tales and legends are handed down by tradition, and journey through the ages from old to young, to be handed on to the next generation as soon as the young become old. And so as the older Celtic tongue has given way before the speech of Teutons, the memory of the folk-tales has faded, and their tradition is passing from among the people.

Many stories were lost, but of others which have never been written many have lived on in tradition till our own times. These have been collected from the men and women of the peasantry themselves before the spread of modern life and utilitarianism has quite crushed the people's imagination and their memory for the beauties of the past. Amongst the most ancient tales there are some which give a wonderful picture of pagan life, so that from the glimpse of life and manners in Ireland we can conjecture how the same Celtic race lived in other parts of Europe.

CHAPTER XII

ANCIENT KINGS AND HEROES

Few nations are more proud of their royal race than the Irish, and the royal race traces itself back to the days of Pharaoh, when a Scythian Prince named Gadelas, living near the Red Sea, was bitten by a poisonous serpent and healed by the sacred rod of Moses. Moses then prophesied that the Prince's descendants should later possess a country in which there should be no snakes or serpents. From that time on they carried a flag upon which was shown a serpent coiling round a rod. And legend says that is why twisting and twining lines are to be found on all the old carved stones and kept their place in the writing of the monks, though others there are who say that men carved these twisting lines in imitation of the plaited wattles that formed the framework of their huts. In due course a descendant of Gadelas landed in Ireland, and his followers were called "Gadels" or "Gaels," which name they keep to this day; as their King was called Milesius, they were also known as Milesians. It is curious that the

present name Ireland was derived from Ir, one of the sons of Milesius, and its old name of Scotia came from Scota, the widow of Milesius, who led the thirty galleys in their descent upon the coast of the Emerald Isle. So in due time these sons of Milesius gave even to Scotland its present name.

Of course, the thirty galleys did not find the promised isle empty. There were still left some of very ancient race called "Firbolgs" who tilled the ground, and some of their cleverer conquerors called the "De Danann," who could work in metal and knew many trades. And when the Milesians landed, the De Danann ran out to meet them, and said it was not fair of them to come upon an undefended country; but if the galleys would go back into their boats to a distance of nine waves from the shore, and could manage to land again, then the De Danann would acknowledge them as masters. Now, although the De Danann were no soldiers, they were learned in magic; so they raised a great storm, and the galleys were dispersed and cast up on the shore far apart. After that several battles were fought, in one of which Scota was killed, and they buried her near to Tralee, in proof of which there are still to be seen the stones over her grave, and the name of the place is Glen Scohene to this day. And as for the Firbolg farmers and De Danann workers,

THE LACE-MAKER.

they were looked down upon by the fighting Milesians, as workers usually are by soldiers. They were allowed to live on, working for their masters as slaves, and were called the "unfree" clans, because only the fighting Milesians were allowed to have any voice in the making of their Kings.

And all this happened about 3,000 years ago, and for 2,500 years Ireland was ruled over by Kings who were all descendants of Milesius. In fact, they can still claim to be so ruled, for the present Royal House can number among its ancestors one of the royal Princesses of Leinster.

It was soon after the Milesians landed that one of the Queens built the palace on a hill, which was called after her, Tea's Palace, but with which we are more familiar as Tara. It was a royal spot before the Firbolg and De Danann Kings had lived there, though who these were and how they lived we do not know. However, we do know the names of the earliest Milesian Kings who reigned 3,000 years ago, and that takes us back to the time before Rome appeared on the Tiber (754 B.C.) or Athens raised her most famous temples.

What the buildings of Tara were like we do not know, though in the imagination of the story-teller they were grand and mighty, and we know they were immense, for the grassy mounds that still outline the halls and buildings cover an

enormous space. The oldest part is still called the Rath na Righ (which is pronounced Ra na Ree), and means "House of the Kings." The word "Rath," which occurs in so many Irish place-names, means house, and the word by itself has been adopted into English to mean the remains of these old forts and palaces whose moss and grass covered boundaries occur so profusely over the country.

The Rath na Righ is on the very top of the hill, and to the south of it there can be seen the outline of the huge assembly hall where the great banquets were held. Wonderful feasts they must have been, with the middle of the hall filled with tubs of wine and great open fires, where the De Danann slave-servants cooked the meat for the Milesian guests, who sat at long tables down the sides. Goblets of gold and silver were filled from the central vats, and each man's portion was according to his rank. It was within a hundred years of the beginning of the Milesian rule that the law was made which settled how many colours might be worn by people of different ranks, so the guests at a Tara banquet would appear in more and more dazzling array as their position was nearer to the upper end where sat the King.

The Stone of Destiny rested at Tara. It had been brought there by the De Danann, and in

ancient days it gave forth a strange noise at the crowning of the rightful King. The Milesian prophets foretold that wherever that stone should be, there should reign a Prince of the house of Milesius. Certain it is that one of these Princes took it to Scotland, and was crowned upon it about A.D. 600, and they kept it in the Abbey of Scone. There it remained till Edward I. brought it to England and placed it in Westminster Abbey, to be the Coronation Stone for all English Monarchs. Thus it may be seen how the words of the Milesian prophet have proved to be true ; but the stone has lost the power of emitting that strange sound of recognition which it possessed in the days of the De Danann.

It was at Tara that the learned King Achy, the Ollamh, began the celebrated "Assembly of Tara," about 1000 B.C. To this assembly once every three years came all the Kings (for there were provincial Kings, as well as the head King), Princes, Ollamhs, judges, and great soldiers. Here they made new laws, or changed the old ones ; and then they examined into all the historical records, both of the past and present. Then it was that the historical Ollamhs had such a busy time, and were so mercilessly degraded if they tampered with the facts. The histories were solemnly written in the "Saltair of Tara," which was the book of the chief King, and

kept in his palace. It must not be thought that any traces of this book are to be found, but Ollamhs and bards knew much of it by heart, and taught it to their disciples who came after them. And so the knowledge of these matters was kept up by the tradition, till in the sixth century or so A.D. the Christian monks began to write, and from that time onward the number of Irish manuscripts grew. It is from these manuscripts that we find accounts of what the people and their Kings did in prehistoric times.

So it came about that in the tenth and eleventh centuries a certain poet, Cuan O'Lochain, gave a long account of the "Saltair of Tara," but *he* says it was compiled by the great King Cormac Mac Art, who came to the throne early in the third century. Other ancient books went so far as to say that the "Saltair of Tara" contained all the names of the Kings and their battles and antiquities from the very beginning of the world. At any rate, it is because of these old books that scholars in Ireland now know so much about the days of which other nations are ignorant.

All the nobles had their private historians, and the bards sang the deeds of their ancestors. In later times the bards used their powers in a very terrible way, and, by reciting poems, made fun of and attacked anyone who displeased them. They despised all trade and toil, of course, and

lived on the patronage and hospitality of the Kings and nobles. This they repaid by composing songs in praise of their patrons, and it is interesting to learn that odes from a poet of high rank were worth three cows each; but if composed by a bard of third-rate powers, they were only valued at half a cow. Should the bards not be treated with due respect, or should they receive ungenerous rewards, their songs of praise were turned into scathing satire. It is recorded that one noble was driven to madness, and finally death, by the bitterness of a poem in which he was cruelly satirized.

Such power naturally led to insolence, and the Brehons at last had to make laws dealing with this weapon of social torture. They tried to limit the satires, but effected little. Finally, the whole race of Ollamhs and bards became so intolerable in their exactions and insolence that in about the seventh century A.D. the King tried to kill the entire race—men and women. He did not quite succeed in extirpating them, but he considerably reduced their number, their possessions, and their privileges.

There was once a chief poet named Seanchan, who went on a visit to Guaire, King of Connaught, accompanied by an enormous retinue of other bards and poetesses and pupils. Now, although King Guaire was of hospitable character, and, moreover, loved to hear the recitals of the company,

yet, after a while, he felt the support of such a large number to be rather a tax, so he consulted his family as to what he could do, and they hit upon a plan. It was the King's privilege to call upon the bard for any poem. Guaire called upon him to recite the most famous of the Irish heroic stories—the "Tain bo Cuailgne"—the Cattle Raid of Cooley, and Seanchan could only remember one part of it, for as everyone knew, the story of the Tain had been lost when certain stones upon which the tale was cut in the ancient Ogham letters had been carried away. So Seanchan was overcome with shame, gave back all his presents to Guaire, and left the Court. He was in such distress that his two sons said they would go and search for the Tain.

"It can only be learned from the mouth of Fergus, son of Roy, who composed it," said the old man; "and no one even knows where he lies buried."

The two brothers, however, set off, and, as always happened in days so long ago, good luck befell them. They came upon an old, old stone on which, in Ogham writing, they read: "Here lies Fergus son of Roy." As this search happened in Christian days, a holy hermit was fetched, and they all prayed for three days and three nights. Then arose the spirit of Fergus and sang the lay through from beginning to end. And though the recital

lasted the whole night, every word and note was imprinted on the memory of Seanchan's younger son. Then the boy went back, and again Guaire spread his banquet. This time it was the boy who rose, and, striking on his harp, held the guests spell-bound as he recited the story of the Tain. As he finished the last notes the harp dropped from his hands and he fell dead.

So once more the Tain was lost, but all that could be remembered was written down, and because it was inscribed on the hide of St. Ciaran's pet cow, the book that contained it was known as the "Book of the Dun Cow." Later on, in 1106, this was copied by the monks of Clonmacnoise, and that copy is one of Dublin's treasures. Another copy of the Tain is to be found in another wonderful old illuminated book—the book of Leinster.

This Tain which is so famous in Irish literature, and indeed in world literature, is the story of a certain cattle raid conducted by Meave, Queen of Connaught, and it came about in this way: Queen in her own right, she had married Ailill More, son of the King of Leinster, and one day they had a quarrel as to who possessed the greatest wealth. They counted up all their gold and silver ornaments and vessels, their golden crowns and jewels, their dresses of red, blue, and yellow, their horses and sheep, their pigs and cattle. And as they counted up their lists they were exactly equal.

But beyond all these things Ailill possessed a beautiful bull known as the "White Horned," and in all Meave's herds there was not one that could equal it. Then Meave made inquiries through the length and breadth of Ireland till she heard of the Dun Bull of Cooley (Cooley being near Dundalk). So she sent to the owner Dare to ask for it, and at first he said she could have it ; but her messengers bragged so much that he changed his mind and refused it. Then Meave got together a great army and marched into Ulster, burning everything on the way, till she captured the Dun Bull and sent him back with fifty heifers and eight men to Connaught as she had vowed. But though the Dun Bull was won, Meave's army was defeated, and had to retreat to Connaught. But no sooner did the Dun Bull and the White Horned catch sight of each other than they pawed the earth so fiercely that they sent the sods flying across their shoulders, and they rolled their eyes like flames of lightning. All day long they charged and thrust, struggled and bellowed, traversing much of Ireland during the time. Next morning the people saw the Dun Bull carrying part of his enemy on his horns. Then the bull darted madly home. He stopped to drink at the Shannon, and dropped there one of the White Horned's loins, so the place has been called the Ford of the Loin—or Athlone—to this day, to mark the spot. Mad

THE "GATE OF IRELAND": THE "CAMBRIA" LEAVING KINGSTON HARBOUR.

with passion, he rushed on, killing all whom he met, till he reached his home in Cooley, when he gave such bellowings of triumph that his heart burst in his breast, and that was the end of the cattle raid of Cooley.

But it is not just the capture of the bull that makes up the principal part of the story. There are tales of wonderful feats performed by heroes on both sides, just as there are in the old Greek stories, and the chief hero who fought on the side of Ulster was Cuchulain, who was so strong and skilful that he could overcome ninety men in a day. Then there are love stories too. There is the wistful tale of Deirdre, about whom it was prophesied by the Druids at her birth that she should be a child of disaster to Ulster, but who was so beautiful that she was betrothed to the King Conor. But the story tells how she fled from the King to Scotland with one of the sons of Usnach and his two brothers, and how, later on, Conor invited them back under an oath of safety, and how he broke his oath so that some of his own knights of the Red Branch would have nothing to do with him, but went into Connaught and took service with Queen Meave.

It is interesting that the central idea of this old Irish epic is not the taking of a city, or the founding of a kingdom, but merely the capture of a bull. And that reminds us of what an impor-

tant part cattle have played in the ancient life of Ireland. There are all sorts of legends about them, especially of the travels of a marvellous white heifer called the Bo Finn, who was a gift from the Western Sea, and sent to fill the land with splendid cattle, so that the people should never know want and hunger. And every spot that the Bo Finn rested at, and every well that she drank from, was called after her, and the names remain to this day to mark the places, so when we find a "Tober-bo-Finn," which means the well of the White Cow, we know that that was one of the spots where she quenched her thirst.

The value of the cows to a pastoral people is, of course, obvious, and in Ireland it was common for a man's wealth to be estimated in cows, so that, as has been noted, dress and even poetry were priced in cows. The idea is scarcely dead, for a short time ago there appeared in an Irish cycle of songs one dealing with a "Woman of Three Cows."

The fairies are always very anxious to capture specially valuable cows, and carry them off to their palace under the earth ; so when a farmer finds one of his herd giving no milk, or falling sick, he knows that a fairy has carried her off, and has sent an old witch to take the form of the cow instead. So he is careful to drive all his cows through the fire on St. John's Eve (the old festival of Baal), or, if that is too far off, and he fears present disaster, he

BEEHIVE DWELLINGS, COUMENOOLE.

singes the cow's back with a hot coal. Another measure which is very effective is to tie a bunch of primroses to the cow's tail.

There used to be a cow festival in the spring, when the cows were decorated with wreaths of rowan and sprinkled with the first water drawn from a sacred well after midnight on May Day Eve.

At the far-famed Irish wakes, too, it was customary for a man to appear bearing the head of an ox, while a woman carried the head of a cow. This probably represented two pagan deities, like those of Egypt, waiting to receive the soul of the dead, but the meaning of the custom has long since been lost. There used to be many such mystery plays performed at these wakes, but they degenerated into orgies, frequently accompanied by drunkenness, and the priests have done all in their power to put them down.

All the same, the peasants cling to their old ideas of the death-rites with mysterious reverence, and there is little doubt that in some of the far-away spots, specially in the western islands, some of the practices are still kept up in secret. Even in their Christianized form these death-rites are very impressive. In some places when a man is dying twelve lighted rushes are placed round the bed, to keep away the devil or the evil spirits, for they cannot pass through the circle of fire. And there

it is a custom to keep silence for three hours after the death, because the people have a belief that there are two sleeping dogs waiting for the souls of men, and the wail of the mourners may waken them, so that they would devour the soul before it reached the throne of God. In those parts, too, it is customary to leave food for the dead outside the house, a relic of the times when the dead were buried with their arms, and sometimes their chariots, while food was placed by their side, that they might be properly equipped in the next world. In other parts of the country the death-wail, or keen, is raised the moment the soul departs, and everyone who hears the mournful sound breathes a prayer.

At the wakes all the relatives and friends are invited, the oldest relative taking his place at the head of the corpse. There are generally special mourners, too—women who can intone the death-chant with fervour—and these rock to and fro, repeating the syllables "ul-lu-lu" in a long sustained minor wail. Their heads are shrouded as they crouch round the bier, and their swaying bodies seem like some weird spirits from an older world. The ancient death-song of the mourners is sometimes intercepted by a piercing wail from the relatives, and those who counted the dead as their nearest and dearest often break out into a recital of his virtue. Lady Wilde, in her

"Ancient Legends of Ireland," gives a beautiful keen uttered by a mother at the wake of her son. It is translated from the Gaelic :

"O women, look on me ! Look on me, women ! Have you ever seen any sorrow like mine ? Have you ever seen the like of me in my sorrow ? Arrah, then, my darling, my darling, 'tis your mother that calls you. How long you are sleeping. Do you see all the people round you, my darling, and I sorely weeping ? Arrah, what is this paleness on your face ? Sure, there was no equal to it in Erin for beauty and fairness, and your hair was heavy as the wing of a raven, and your skin was whiter than the hand of a lady. Is it the stranger must carry me to my grave, and my son lying here ?"

CHAPTER XIII

ST. PATRICK AND ST. COLUMBA

A FEW miles west of Drogheda there stands a sleepy little old-world spot called Slane. It was on the hill here that St. Patrick first announced his presence in Ireland in 433 by lighting the Paschal fire on Easter Eve. At that very time King Leary was holding a great feast at Tara, nine miles away, and part of the ritual at the festival was the lighting of the Tara fire. While it was burning no other fire was allowed to be kindled in the surrounding country. Everyone had to start a fresh fire with a faggot from Tara; so at the sight of the strange fire on the Hill of Slane the Druids became alarmed. Off drove the King to see what it all meant, and Patrick said he would come to Tara the next day and show the powerlessness of the Druids and their gods. It was not to be supposed that the Druids were pleased at this, and St. Patrick was warned that they would try and murder him on the way. The story runs that he turned himself and his followers into deer as they went through the woods; in any

HOLY WELL AT ST. DONLAUGH'S CHURCH.

case, he and his companions went along chanting a hymn of protection. It is rather a curious mixture of Christian and pagan ideas, for he called upon and "bound unto himself" not only all the powers of heaven, but the powers of the earthly elements as well. Verses of this old Gaelic hymn are still chanted by the western peasants as protection against all forms of evil. At Tara

> "Patrick discoursed of the things to be,
> When time gives way to eternity,
> Of kingdoms that fall, which are dreams, not things,
> And the kingdom built by the King of Kings." *

And the King gave him permission to preach throughout Ireland. The permission was given, in spite of the fact that they were standing in the famous Hall of the Kings, and within sight of Brugh na Boinne, their revered pagan burial-place, the great mounds of which can still be seen at New Grange and Knowth.

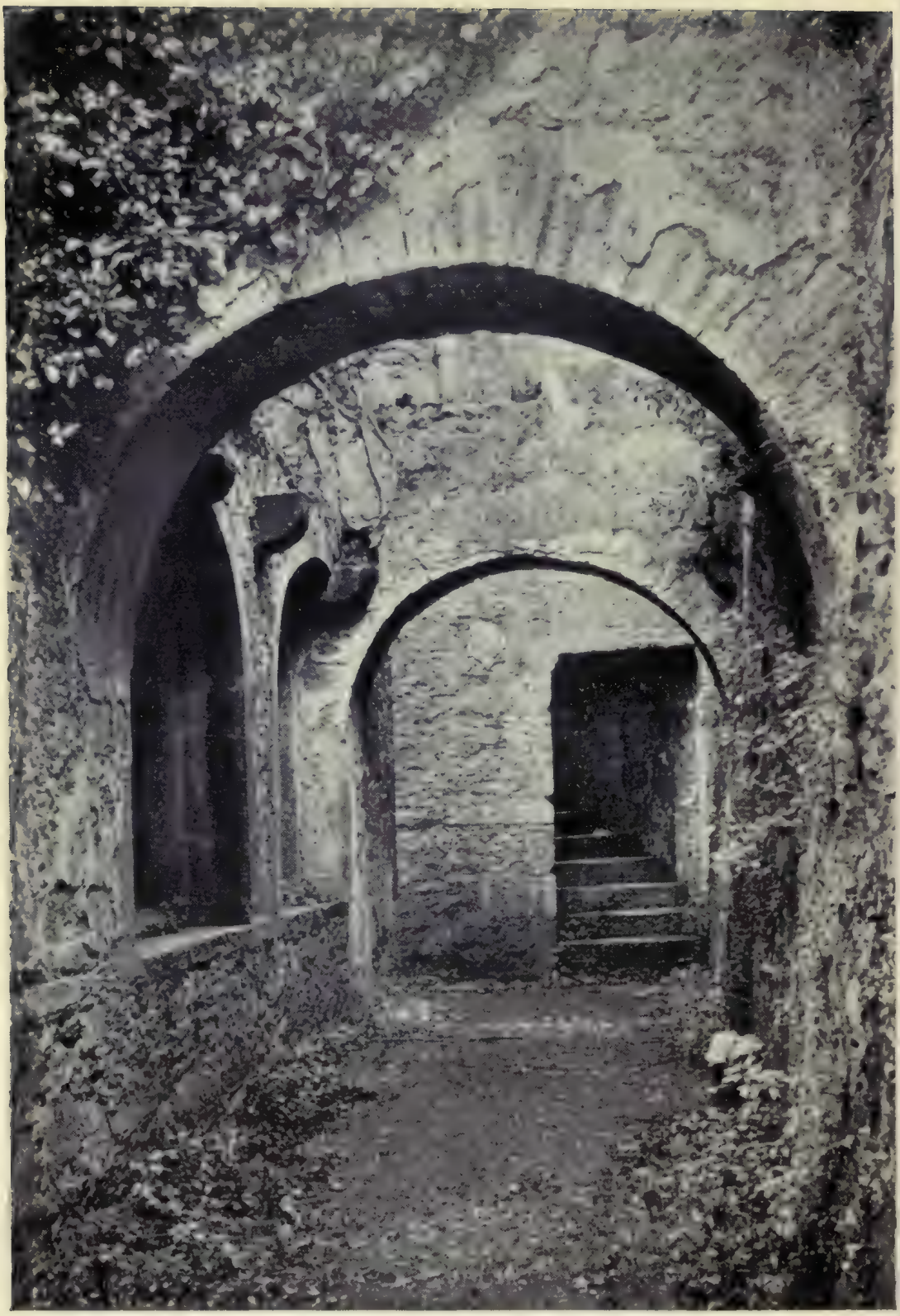
St. Patrick was soon busy in his adopted land, and set to work to Christianize the laws; in fact, he rewrote all the old Brehon laws, with the pagan parts left out, and early copies of his work still exist.

There was no simplicity about St. Patrick's travels. He went about in an organized procession. There was a strong man to carry him over the rivers that were too deep for him to wade,

* "Legends of St. Patrick," by Aubrey de Vere.

and another to carry the famous handbell, little models of which you can still buy as charms in every town in Ireland. Then he had his cook, his bearer, and his waiters. He had carpenters with him to build wooden churches wherever he went; metal-workers to provide altars, bells, and book-covers; and embroiderers to make all the vestments required. So, as he passed on from each halting-spot, he left behind him a fully equipped church, with copies of three or four necessary books.

St. Patrick built his own cathedral on the hill of Armagh, near the ruins of Emania the Golden, the old palace of the Ulster Kings, which had been destroyed some hundred years or so before. Though nothing remains of the great church of St. Patrick, the present cathedral stands on the same site. Round his great church grew up a school of learning, which for several hundred years was famous throughout the length and breadth of Western Europe. Scholars in later years went in such numbers from England that the city of Armagh was divided into three wards, one of which was called the English Ward. There scholars were received with every mark of kindness and hospitality, having free education and board, and even receiving their books as gifts. To this day Upper English Street remains in Armagh as a reminder of those times. Trinity



THE CLOISTERS, ADARE ABBEY.

College, Dublin, is the fortunate possessor of the beautiful "Book of Armagh," which was written there about 800 A.D., and copied, they say, from a still older volume, in which tradition asserts St. Patrick wrote his own life.

St. Patrick founded many schools of learning and monasteries, and in those days they took the form of a kind of village. The monks dug up a mound of earth (a rath), or put up a wall of stones (a cashel), according to the nature of the country. Inside this wall they built their single cells, which were tiny round dwellings, with no other opening than the entrance, and resembled beehives. These were the ordinary dwellings of that time, and examples of them can be seen to this day in some of the western villages. Right at the end of the Dingle peninsula is the curious village of Coumenoole. Ancient stone beehive dwellings can there be seen side by side with ricks of the same shape and cabins of later date, while the people understand nothing but Gaelic.

In those little round cells the scholars slept on the bare earth, or, in less austere circumstances, on skins and rushes. In the centre of the rath were the church, kitchen, and refectory. Not that meals were very sumptuous affairs; one meal a day was the rule, and it consisted of little more than porridge (or stir-about), some vegetables, and oatmeal bread. No gossiping was allowed,

and, indeed, the monks had little leisure. When they were not studying or engaged in prayer, they were busy in the fields, grinding corn at the mill, or drawing water from the well; the well was often one that had been a holy well in pagan times, and so continued to be regarded with reverences in Christian times, and, in fact, even to this day. All that was necessary for the simple life of the monastery the monks had to produce. They kept flocks of sheep, and spun and wove the wool into cloth; their herds of cattle gave them milk; all that they produced in excess of their simple needs and the claims of hospitality—for they kept a guest-house beyond the rath—they gave to the poor. They taught the people round them the arts of peace as applied to agriculture, and cleared roads through the forests. They themselves, however, did not entirely forego the arts of war. The monks in one of these congregations often belonged to some particular clan, and when their clan was at feud with another the monks joined in the fray; in fact, one monastery sometimes had a little fray of its own with another monastery, and slaughter was the result.

Books in those days were very rare, so many of the monks became scribes, and put up a special building known as the House of Writings. In this building the monks copied the Scriptures as well as other books, and put into their work such

power and love that each page became an object of wondrous beauty.

It is from one of these beautiful books—the "Speckled Book," written much later—that we learn how St. Bridget founded many churches, and how so many men came to learn from her that she had to found monasteries as well as convents, and how, as in her great church at Kildare, a partition down the centre of the nave divided the monks from the nuns. It will be remembered that St. Bridget, from association with the De Danann goddess of the same name, has always been connected with fire, and so at Kildare a fire was kept constantly burning night and day, till it was put out in the time of Queen Elizabeth at the suppression of the monasteries.

The most famous saint of Ireland, and, indeed, of the whole Celtic race, was St. Columba, who is as often known as St. Columbkille, and whose name occurs so frequently in the north and east of Ireland. Here a well and a grove, there a church or a cross, all bear witness to the history or tradition of St. Columbkille's wanderings. The town of Derry, whose name means "oak wood," was once known as "Derry Columcille," "the oak wood of Columba," for it was there that St. Columba founded his church and monastery. Centuries later James I. changed it to its less musical present name of Londonderry.

But Columba founded other monasteries than the one at Derry, notably at Glen Columbkille, amongst the beautiful western cliffs of Donegal, a spot still abounding in remains of his settlement; at Durrow, on the "plain of the oaks," near Clara, in what is now called King's County; and at Kells, a few miles to the north-west of Tara. For each of these, so it is said, he wrote copies of the Gospels; that of Derry was lost, but the Book of Durrow and the Book of Kells are still to be seen in Trinity College, Dublin. The beauty of the Book of Kells cannot be exaggerated; the wonderful variety of its lettering (especially its beautiful capital letters), the fineness of the writing, and the wealth of ornamental details, have made it a masterpiece of design, and kept it as a pattern for all succeeding centuries.

Columba had a perfect passion for copying books, and for this purpose borrowed all he could. Once, when on a visit to his old master, Finnian, he wanted to copy the old man's Psalter; so he secretly shut himself up at night in the church, and his left hand gave forth light while he wrote with his right. A youth was attracted by a beam of this curious light, and looked through the key-hole. His prying eye, however, was immediately plucked out by a crane which lived in the church. In this way St. Finnian found out what was going on, and was most indignant at what he considered

THE GALLERUS ORATORY.

a theft of his precious Psalter. He argued that a copy made without permission should belong to the owner of the original, and so demanded possession of it. Columba refused to give it up, and the matter was taken before King Dermot at Tara. King Dermot was more accustomed to dealing with cattle disputes than with the literary differences of holy men, so he gave judgment in characteristic language :

" To the cow her calf, so to the book its copy."

But Columbkille had a temper, so he rose up and defied the King, stalked out of Tara, and stirred up his royal kinsmen of the race of Niall. The result was a battle near Sligo, and Dermot was killed.

The Psalter was taken as a prize, and kept by the O'Donnell family. It was known as the " Battler," and was carried by the clan as a talisman in their battles. A beautiful casket was made for it at Kells about 1100, and it still remains in the O'Donnell family, though it can be seen at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin.

Columbkille afterwards repented of his hasty temper and of the slaughter he had caused, and went to a holy old man for advice. The old man gave him a penance. He was to leave Ireland, and never look upon her fair lands again, and he was to convert to Christianity a number greater than the 3,000 who had been killed at

Sligo. So Columba set sail for Scotland, and founded his famous monastery in Iona, where he lived for thirty-four years.

There is a stone in Columba's birthplace in Donegal which is much resorted to by emigrants before they leave Ireland. Whoever sleeps a night there will never feel homesickness, they say, and the stone is worn thin and smooth by many pious pilgrims.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MONKS AND THEIR TREASURES

In the times of the early Christians, although living in a community was very popular, there were many holy men who preferred to live a solitary life, and built cells or oratories for themselves. They often chose the tops of mountains for their hermitage, and pilgrims still haunt the spots. On the top of Slieve League in Donegal there are the weather-beaten ruins of two old oratories near a couple of holy wells, and the story runs that one of the hermits withdrew there for seven years to do penance for telling a single falsehood. It is perhaps as well that so stringent a penance is not self-inflicted in these days, or there would not be mountains enough to serve our great industrial centres.

On Brandon Hill, in Dingle, is the rude little oratory where St. Brendan spent long years in prayer and silent meditations, shaken by the winds or shrouded by thick mist, but every now and then seeing across the ocean from the Aran Islands in the north to the Skelligs in the south, with bay and river, mountain and valley, moulded into relief

by sunshine and shadow. Out to the west was boundless space, and St. Brendan, drawn by the vision of a blue fairy sea and golden fairy islands shining in the path of the setting sun, went forth to seek the land of the blest. With three curraghs covered with skins and with ninety companions he sailed away, encountering red-mouthed monsters and great whales, passing fairy islands (but not staying there), and weathering awful storms. And after one terrible storm the Devil himself came to visit St. Brendan on his ship, and showed him a picture of the abode of lost souls. For seven years St. Brendan sailed west, and the account of his voyage filled the minds of all men with wonder and awe, as may well be believed. And though he did not actually find the promised land, it is believed that he found America, and to the youths of Ireland, in the last half-century at any rate, this has been the land of their desire.

On Midsummer Eve it is said that a procession climbs up the 3,000 feet to the top of Brandan Hill and lights a bonfire, giving reverence to the Christian saint, and unwittingly carrying on the pagan tradition at the same time.

These processions are often called "patterns," and are allied to the "pardons" of that other Celtic race in Brittany. But, unfortunately, the Irish patterns lack the picturesqueness of the Breton festival, though here and there a group of

ALPHABET STONE, KILMALKEDAR CHURCH, DINGLE.

bright-skirted women and girls comes in from some outlying island. It is feared, too, that "poteen" often plays a part which leads to unseemly revels toward the close of the day.

There are many oratories near the foot of St. Brendan's mountain, and one of them is the finest complete one in Ireland. It is known as the Gallerus oratory, and was probably put up before the year A.D. 600. It is built of stones cut to shape on the inside, and carefully placed one over the other, so that they form a cell, looking like an overturned boat. No cement held the stones together, and it must have been a draughty place for the holy recluse who lived in it. He got very little light, too, and probably sat in his doorway to read his books; when he had finished with them he put them into satchels, which he hung on the three pegs that still remain above the east window.

In those early centuries the monks began to use and instruct people in the Latin form of the letters, and indeed in that language itself. To provide a permanent record the letters were carved on a pillar stone where all could go and see them. One of these alphabet stones is often to be found in the ruins of some church, and, indeed, one can be seen near the Gallerus oratory, in the ruined church of Kilmalkedar.

There are more stones, chiefly found in Kerry, which have a still older writing on them. This is

called the Ogham writing, and is made up of a number of straight strokes standing above or below a long stem line. The names of the letters are taken from the Gaelic names of the trees. Thus the Ogham letter "D" comes from "Duir," an oak (as we saw in "Derry"), and is marked by two strokes above the stem line. The writing is extraordinarily difficult to read, as there is always a doubt whether it should be read backwards or forwards, up or down.

The treasures that would have come down to us from the old monasteries would have been immense, had not the Danes swept into all the harbours and river mouths in Ireland and taken all the treasures they could lay hands on. No churches were safe, and whole schools of monks frequently perished in a night. The boundary rath, or cashel, was soon found to be ineffectual as a protection, and even when a second rath was added and a moat dug between the two the Danes swept past. So special towers were erected, it is generally thought, as places of quick retreat. These round towers are to be found in all parts of Ireland—nearly always near the western entrance to the church. It must in fairness be stated that many other theories have been put forth to explain these fine old towers, but it seems to be most generally accepted that they were erected as a refuge from the Danes.

ROUND TOWER, SWORDS.

The doorway of these towers is always high above the ground, and could only have been reached by a ladder. When the monks had entered, they hastily pulled up the ladder and barred the door. The towers were often as much as 100 feet or more high, and were divided into five stories; some were of less height. One of the most beautiful is still to be seen at Clonmacnoise, complete up to its conical roof, which is without any opening. The one at Glendalough is 132 feet high, and has six or seven stories. Each story was connected by a ladder with the one above, and had one tiny window; the top story had four windows, and the doorway was 10 or 12 feet above the ground. Although the marauding Danes were probably much discomfited by the descent of large stones from the top of the tower, this was only a temporary place of refuge, and the Danes made many an attack with disastrous results. They seemed to have specially hated books, and as they could not burn them—the vellum being rather fire-resisting—they threw them into the water, having first removed everything valuable from the covers. In this way masses and masses of Gaelic literature, emanating from the great schools at Armagh, Lismore, Cashel, and Downpatrick, were destroyed and lost for ever.

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